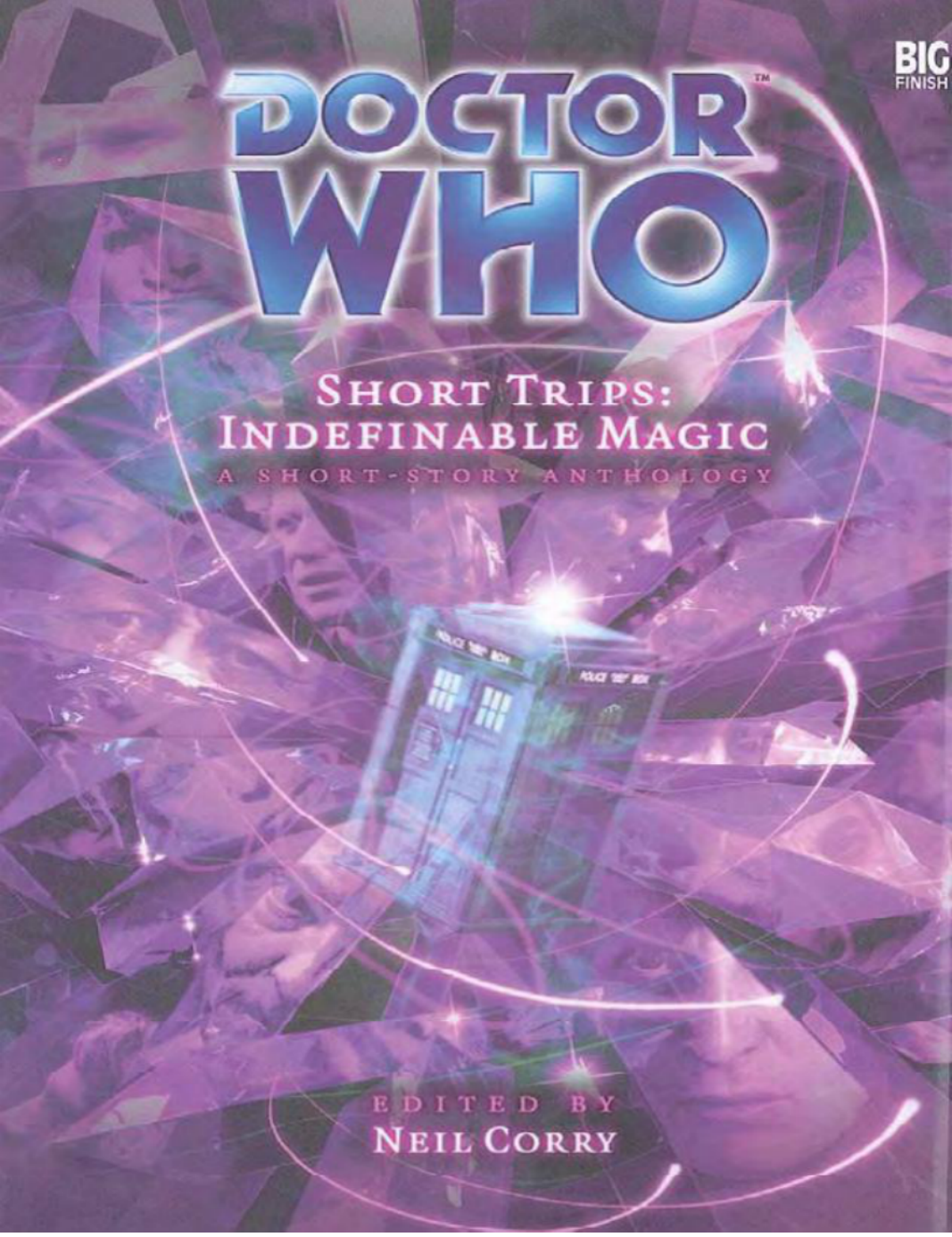
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SHORT TRIPS:
INDEFINABLE MAGIC
A SHORT-STORY ANTHOLOGY
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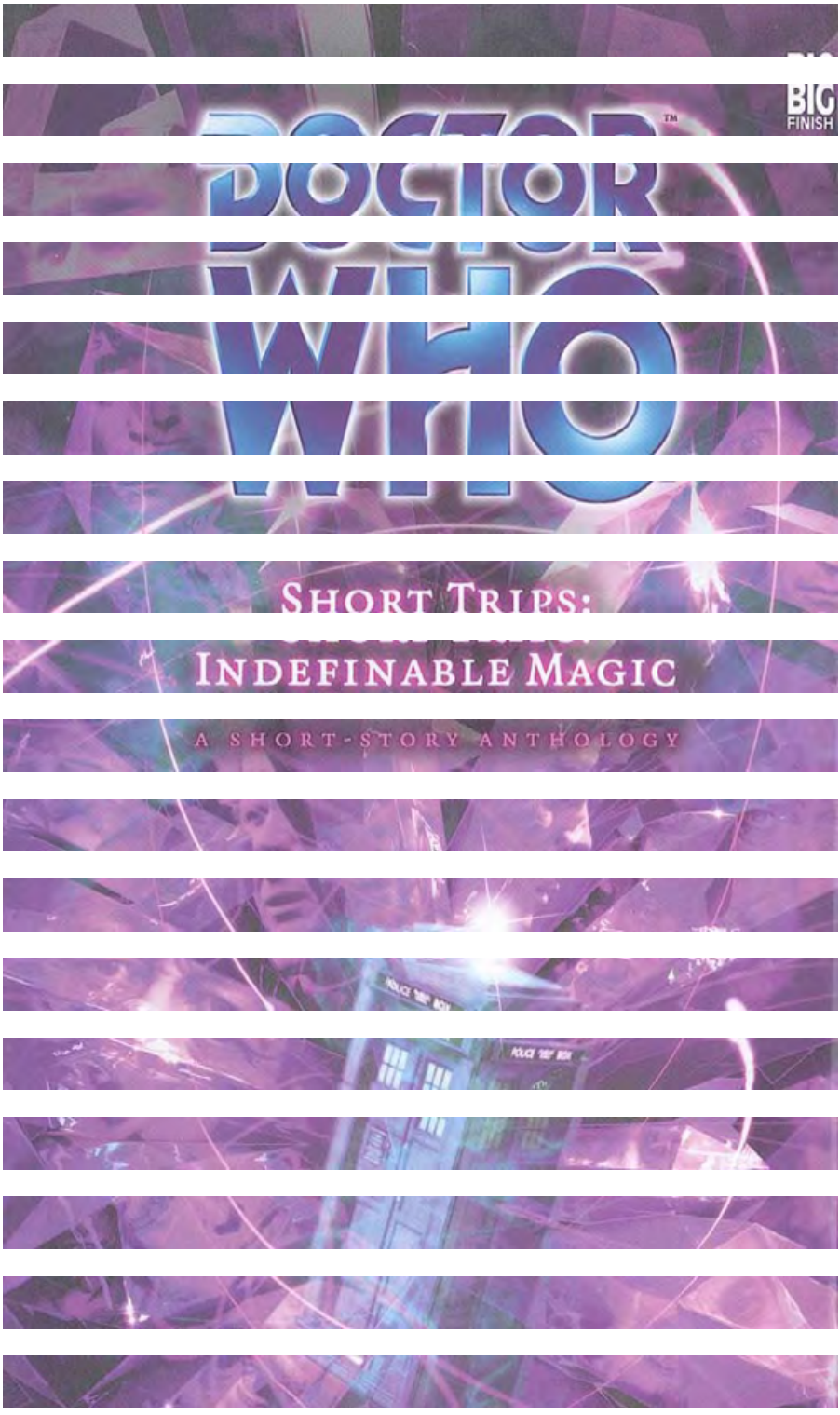
BIG FINISH
DOCTOR WHO
SHORT TRIPS:
INDEFINABLE MAGIC
A SHORT-STORY ANTHOLOGY

This book is dedicated to Cady, Kieran, James (both of them),

Claire, Ben, Tash, Elzani and everyone else who made working on Doctor Who Battles In Time *and the* Doctor Who DVD Files *such a joy.*

And, of course, the NotPlayers.

CONTENTS

What Has Happened to the Magic of 'Doctor Who'?

1

Gareth Roberts

Phoenix James Goss

3

The Power Supply Eddie Robson

14

Favourite Star Ian Farrington

30

Hiccup in Time Matthew James

41

Shamans Steve Lyons

62

The Fall of the Druids David N Smith

74

Priceless Junk Cavan Scott and Mark Wright

94

Have You Tried Turning It Off And Then Back On Again? 109

John Callaghan

The Reign Makers Gareth Wigmore

125

Pass It On Simon Guerrier

137

The Science of Magic Michael Rees

150

Hello Goodbye Jim Sangster

166

Trial by Fire Mike Amberry

179

Death Sentences Stephen Hatcher

194

Once Upon a Time Machine Stephen Dunn

206

Mardi Gras Massacre Arnold T Blumberg

221

Blessed Are the Peacemakers Caleb Woodbridge

239

About the Authors

259

What Has Happened to the

Magic of ‘Doctor Who’?

A series of nine imaginary letters

I

Gareth Roberts

Miss Verity Lambert,

BBC Producer, ‘Doctor Who’

18th May 1964

Dear Miss Lambert,

I’m writing to say that following the conclusion of the latest

‘Doctor Who’ story, the adventure set on the planet Marinus, I shall regretfully no longer be watching your ‘Doctor Who’ programme

on the BBC. It seems to me that what began as an unusually

challenging and dramatic science fiction serial has lost its magic and deteriorated swiftly into standard ‘telly’ fare.

The first thirteen episodes of the serial – leading from the

discovery of *Tardis* by the teachers up to the terrifying adventure inside the spaceship itself – were, I thought, strikingly atmospheric and satisfyingly mature. Although the serial’s basic format could be seen as somewhat pulpy by its very nature (the dotty old scientist and his pretty young granddaughter with their amazing machine),

the realisation of the stories was refreshingly original. I was

especially impressed, during the serial’s early days, by the direction, with its regular use of close-up and shadow; the otherworldy music,

especially notable in the signature tune and the Dalek story; and the sheer sincerity and seriousness of the writing.

And it is the lapse in the quality of the writing since the journey to Cathay with Marco Polo that has most dismayed me. The stories

prior to this had given as a fascinating interaction between four very interesting characters, all four very well played, within a

wonderfully open dramatic framework. I particularly remember the

old Doctor's apparently selfish condemnation of the teachers'

compassion towards the wounded caveman, which will have raised

fascinating moral questions in the heads of younger viewers. Also

worthy of note was the disagreement between the teachers over

challenging the pacifism of the Thal people against the Dalek

people. These were gripping scenes and dramatic in the truest sense of the word, opening up the world of human experience to the

young. No small achievement for a Saturday afternoon serial.

What is more, this drama was always played convincingly. The

terrible ordeals of the *Tardis* travellers in the caveman's forest or the H-bombed planet Skaro saw our heroes dirty, sweaty, close to

death – vulnerable and thus believable.

Sad to say, Miss Lambert, since the unconvincing conclusion to

the 'trapped in *Tardis*' story, most of the unique qualities seen in the 'Doctor Who' programme seem to have gone west. Doctor Who

himself is no longer a somewhat alarming and unknowable figure,

but has become an amiable dodderer – his 'aches-and-pains' when

meeting Kublai Khan were played for strained laughs, likewise his

role as the defence counsel in the Marinus story. Susan has become an ordinary schoolgirl, blundering into trouble like any cheap

American serial heroine and acting unbelievably stupidly (walking

off into the Gobi desert without telling anybody, *et cetera*). The teachers have been reduced to little more than ciphers, Mr

Chesterton the dashing sword-fighting hero and Miss Wright the

damsel in distress. Worst of all, the interactions between the quartet have become coy, cosy and knowing.

Furthermore, the Cathay and Marinus stories – unlike the

previous ones – were of a piece in being daftly plotted and

essentially meaningless, being a variety of scrapes and rescues that served to do nothing but delay their inevitable conclusions. There is no grit, no reality to these perils, and thus no meaning to the stories or the characters any longer. The inane chatter in *Tardis* at the beginning of the Marinus story perfectly sums up what has become

of 'Doctor Who'. It has gone from being a drama that inhabited the serial format to being a television serial, nothing more nor less than one would expect.

I had hoped that 'Doctor Who' might return to its original

brilliance before it ended, but I'm afraid I have lost patience and will not be looking in again.

Mr Raymond Phibbs, Ebbsfleet

What Has Happened to the Magic of 'Doctor Who'? continues on page 28

Phoenix

James Goss

An adventure of the Eighth Doctor

The Doctor and Fire sat in front of the...

'Excuse me, I'll just put that out,' says Fire, and does.

'Thank you,' says the Doctor, 'I didn't know where to look.'

There is a silence between them, apart from Fire gently crackling

away in his chair, the flames licking at the edges of his neat, black suit.

The Doctor sits in the other chair, simply waiting.

Finally, Fire speaks.

It's four in the morning. I'm not sure, to be honest, what day it is any more. I'm hovering somewhere between asleep and awake, but

still pottering around the flat. The rash is still itching and raw. I've bathed it, I've oiled it, and now I'm waiting for the next pill to take effect. It's what I've done all week since this infernal thing started.

I'm getting used to staring out onto the estate, watching nothing

happen in the courtyard until dawn. And then I'll sleep until the pill wears off, and then it'll start all over again.

I go to make myself a cup of tea and then think, 'Sod it,' and

head for the drinks cabinet. I've been working my way through

duty-free novelties and party leftovers. Is it time for a cheeky crème de menthe? I settle down in the window seat, reading a days-old

paper and sipping and trying not to scratch. I can feel my head start to nod and my eyelids start to flutter. The pill is taking merciful effect.

As I drift off, my eyes wander over the courtyard – the garden of

trees with a few swings and benches. This is normally the time that the squirrels start to make their rounds.

I'll often see Margaret out there, too. She's always up early,

walking her enormous dog before starting one of her three jobs.

Sometimes I'll see one of the kids creeping home late across the

lawn, furtive and giggly, and I'll think, 'When did that stop being me?'

I see none of these things this morning. Instead, standing proudly in the centre of the garden is a unicorn.

I bloody love these pills, I think, and then I fall asleep.

* * *

3

It's four in the morning again.

Today's exotic little beverage is some kind of Hungarian thing.

There's a picture of peaches on the bottle but I'm unconvinced. It tastes of soap and makes me cough violently, which takes my mind

off the burning sensation in my arms, so it's not all bad.

I curl up in the window seat, waiting for the pill to knock me out.

I look across the estate. Sadly, there's no sign of the unicorn – burl didn't expect there to be. There are just a few squirrels running

quickly out of a hedge. As I watch, one of them is jerked back and vanishes into the hedge. There's a frantic shaking of the leaves. I wonder if it's my cat out hunting, but doubt it. Marmaduke's far too lazy.

I doze a little – there's an early warmth in the air and it's starting to feel like summer. I've always felt the hours of dawn are the most magical of the day, when anything can happen, as no one is around

to see it.

I open my eyes and on the lawn is a bird. It's almost like a

peacock but with shining feathers and a giant head, inquisitive and fantastical. It looks like an old drawing come to life.

As I watch, a man creeps from behind a tree and towards the bird.

He's like a smarter version of the man who lives at Number 43, who has a ponytail, smelly dog and no furniture. 'Need trousers, velvet coat and flowing curls. Bless. Maybe works at the university,

although he's offering the bird bread, which puts him down among

the lonely pigeon-feeders.

He throws a slice of bread towards the bird. It opens its beak and a jet of flame shoots out.

Despite my surprise I hear the man say, ‘Toast!’

I laugh, which is when he turns around and looks directly up at

me.

‘Good morning,’ he says.

I was surprised when the doorbell rang. Even more surprised to

find the strange man at my door. Handsome and neat and kind, he

doesn’t look real – like a magician from a child’s storybook.

‘Good morning,’ I say.

He smiles, and it’s a wonderful smile. ‘I’m the Doctor,’ he says.

‘May I come in?’

I let him. Normally, I’m a bit cautious on the estate, but I’m so

full of pills that if I jumped up and down I’d probably rattle, and that Hungarian stuff is giving me a lovely glow. I hope I don’t pass out then, hours later, find he’s cleared out the flat. I offer him a drink and he insists on tea. We settle down in the living room. He chooses a chair where he can watch the garden. There’s an air about 4

him. A little older, and with a decent haircut, he’d be perfect casting for an ad campaign featuring an early-forties business leader in a top-of-the-range four by four. It’s his eyes. Or maybe it’s my drink.

I can’t help but think that he seems so genuine and caring, and,

oddly for his age, so wise. He’s certainly not in any hurry. ‘So,’ he says, ‘Trouble sleeping?’

‘Can’t sleep,’ I explain.

I show him an arm, all red and blistered. ‘It’s some kind of

allergic rash. Like sunburn. Covered in it. Had it for a week or so.

My GP’s baffled –just stuffed me full of pills and told me it should go

away eventually. They knock me out, but the itch comes back.'

The Doctor looks at it sympathetically but also critically. He holds his hand over it, as though trying to work out how warm it is. He makes a serious little 'hmm' noise and then tuts. 'Try not to scratch it,' he says.

'I promise I'm doing my best not to, but it's, you know, burning.'

'Yes, I can guess,' he says, sadly. 'But just don't. Really.'

'Okay,' I laugh, thinking he sounds like my mother.

'Now,' he says, sipping his tea and looking at the garden, 'What have you seen out there?'

I tell him about this morning, seeing him and the bird that breathed fire, and then I mention yesterday's unicorn.

He's interested. More, he believes me, even though I don't believe me – mostly. 'Did you get a really good, close look?' he says.

'No, I was just dozing off I didn't really believe it when I saw it.'

The Doctor nods, 'I'm sure you did. I'm just wondering what it was made of. My firebird has flown, but shall we see if we can find your unicorn?' He smiles as if this is completely normal for him.

I start to suspect that this Doctor could be merely humouring me, but I see the grin on his face and his eager eyes. Suddenly, it all feels like the start of an exciting adventure. I shake off the urge to doze. We put down our drinks and head to the garden.

On the way we meet Margaret, waddling past with her dog.

'Morning, Doctor!' she says, smiling. Margaret would know him. She knows everyone. She's a tiny woman but as wide as she is tall,

always in a black puffa jacket that makes her look like a jolly Christmas pudding.

The Doctor leans down and pats her enormo-hound. It looks at him with love and delight, and then runs off to lick some railings.

Margaret laughs and walks off with a wave.

'Fascinating woman,' he says as we walk into the garden. I'm standing there in an old T-shirt and pyjama trousers, feeling the wet 5 grass through my slippers.

The Doctor stands beside me, perfectly still. He's breathing deeply, a big smile on his face.

In the corner of the sky, day is just starting to break. There's a little chill in the air, and even a touch of mist.

'Perfect,' I say. 'Thank you for bringing me here. Look at the dew on the grass. I could run through it barefoot.'

'I wouldn't,' the Doctor's voice is sharp, 'I really wouldn't. For one thing, Margaret's forgot her pooper-scooper again. And then there's the danger of... well, just keep off the grass.' He smiles.

We stand still. If I weren't so puzzled by what I've seen the last two mornings, I'd say I was getting bored. And then the firebird emerges, stepping out from the lengthening shadows behind a beech tree. It has a nervous, sideways walk, like someone edging onstage.

We stay completely still, riveted by the arrival of this truly fantastic creature, with its glistening wings and fearsome claws. It ignores us, pecking away at the grass, making contented little noises to itself. It is the most beautiful thing that I have ever seen but I know it can't be real.

'Look closely,' suggests the Doctor, whispering. 'Tell me what

you see.'

I do, squinting at its wonderful, shining feathers, its perfectly

sculpted torso, its noble beak, its impressive eyes and...

The Doctor edges half a step closer to me. 'Look harder.'

And I suddenly see what's wrong. That long neck – it's the body

of a squirrel, joined onto several pigeon breasts, spreading out into the torso of a small dog. And that plumage – it's an elaborately

fanned-out mixture of pigeon feathers and strips of coloured tinfoil.

Someone has stuck this creature together. But it's walking, and

pecking and emitting happy little puffs of flame. 'What?' I ask the Doctor. It's all I can think of saying.

He just smiles. 'I'll tell you tomorrow. It's nearly over now – for some reason, the magic ends with dawn.'

As he speaks, the sunrise gently arrives in the courtyard. The

firebird looks up from grilling a worm and steps neatly back into the shadows of a tree. There is a rustle of the hedge and it's gone.

The Doctor turns to me. 'Time for you to go to bed. Sweet

dreams, and remember, don't scratch.'

I leave him in the garden, watching the sunrise.

We have tea in the garden the next morning. I've brought a little

flask and two foldout chairs. The Doctor seems delighted. He sits

playing with something he says is a screwdriver but looks like an

old camping torch.

6

'I don't remember seeing you on the estate before,' I say,

carefully.

‘I’ve been around,’ he makes a vague gesture, pouring himself

some more tea. ‘I suppose you could say I’m a new arrival,’ a little smile, ‘the world sometimes throws out strange things, and I spend my time –’

‘Fighting them?’ I ask, amused.

He shakes his head. ‘Fight? No, not really. Putting things back to normal. Although, sometimes, normal’s a bit dull, don’t you think?’

I think to myself that the Doctor’s quite a strange creature

himself, perfectly at ease on a deckchair as we wait for the rise of the phoenix.

We smile and sit there for a few minutes, just enjoying the peace

in the garden.

Once he finishes his second cup of tea, he points in the direction of the hedge. ‘I have something to show you.’ We head over, and he pushes aside the bits of hedge to reveal something lying there.

‘What is it?’ I ask.

‘The remains of the unicorn,’ he explains. I look, and at first

glance, all I can see are some old scraps of bone and toilet paper.

And then I see the shape, and the horn, a weird fusion of bone and Cornetto wrapper.

‘Blimey,’ I say.

The Doctor nods.

‘And?’

The Doctor grins. ‘Shall we go upstairs, and I’ll tell you?’

And we do. And he does. And I don’t believe him. Well, not at

first.

‘You’ve heard of talking books?’ he asks.

‘Of course.’ I’m wondering where this is going.

‘Well, imagine thinking books. Imagine a travel guidebook that

knows exactly where you want to go, and tells you how to get there, picking out just the kind of restaurants that you like, calling ahead to get you a great hotel deal, tickets to the theatre, and even helping translate what the locals are saying.’

‘Wow,’ I say, ‘that’s a great idea.’

‘Isn’t it?’ he says, grinning with delight. His face falls, suddenly grave. ‘Well, someday, someone will have it. And it turns out to be a terrible idea.’

‘Why?’ I ask, when I want to ask ‘What the hell are you on

about?’

‘The books are too intelligent, too smart. They’re always doing

that with artificial intelligences. Normally, it doesn’t matter if your 7

vacuum cleaner’s a bit smart, but the books become sentient,

convinced their contents are factually correct, and start psychically altering things they don’t agree with at a genetic level. They cause havoc if left lying around. Which is what people are always doing

with books, sadly.’

‘What does that mean?’ I ask, when I want to say something a lot

coarser.

‘Abandoned books with overactive imaginations and nothing to

occupy their minds start to change the world. Perhaps that building isn’t as tall as it should be, those flowers aren’t the right shade of blue. Perhaps there are just more people than there should be.’

And right then I know it’s true. He looks at me straight on, as if challenging me to call him a liar, a fraud, a conman, when he can

never be any of those things. This is the truth and the idea of

thinking books spirals in my already overactive imagination.

‘Oh my God. How do they stop it?’

‘After the first editions, they’re hurriedly reprinted with a health warning stamped on the cover, ‘PLEASE DO NOT LOSE THIS

BOOK’. But it was too late.’

I am both amused and alarmed. ‘And what happened?’

‘The publishers were accused of illegal terraforming and genetic

warfare. Avoiding bankruptcy, they issued an enormous product

recall, cancelled the range, and corralled all of the books in a

staggeringly secure vault, where they could argue with each other

about the nature of reality. Unfortunately, occasionally, one of the books escapes. One moment it’s there, and you know exactly where

you put it, the next, it could be anywhere in space and time.’

‘What?’ I say, laughing. My arm is burning again so I risk a

quick scratch, but the Doctor shoots me a stern look.

There is a sudden noise from the hall and the Doctor stiffens. But it is just my cat, pottering in after a long night of mystery.

He looks quietly between us, and then settles down on a cushion.

The Doctor relaxes. ‘Oh,’ he says, ‘for a minute there I worried it might be... Oh, never mind.’

‘The book coming to get you?’ I tease.

He shrugs and nods simultaneously. ‘Something like that.’

‘So what you’re saying is that one of these books has escaped and

is making merry in the garden?’

The Doctor nods, gravely. ‘Oh yes. I’m very serious. It’s a

bestiary of legendary and magical creatures. An insane notion for a thinking book, and only one copy was ever published. But it’s

escaped from the vault and is about to put the world to rights – or so it thinks.’

I laugh, finding life fun again.

8

‘There’s nothing more dangerous than a book with ideas,’ says

the Doctor.

‘I can’t agree,’ says the cat.

We stop and look at the cat. Unblinking, it looks back. ‘I speak for the book,’ he says simply.

I’m astonished but the Doctor just smiles. ‘How do you do? A

talking cat! Amazing!’ He is genuinely enchanted.

‘But how?’ I ask. It feels like an obvious question but it needs

asking. Marmaduke shrugs, a tiny, catty movement. ‘When we went

sunbathing together. The book reached out to me and I agreed to

speak for it.’ He looks at the Doctor and then me. ‘I’ve been

watching both of you closely.’

‘I see.’ The Doctor leans forward, crouching down slightly so that he is at the cat’s eye level. ‘You understand that the bestiary isn’t real – that the book is making creatures that have never existed?

That it’s using real lives to do this?’

Marmaduke yawns. ‘All that’s true enough, but I don’t really

care. Some of the smaller ones were quite tasty. The book says that it has nearly finished creating the catalogue. It believes that once that has been done, it can rest. And I really do understand the value of a good sleep.’ He yawns again, stretches out his forepaws, and

shuts his eyes.

The Doctor is both worried and delighted. ‘It’s nearly complete,

is it? “The heat is on. Something-something we regret.” Do you

know, I’ve never quite caught the second line? Anyway, the heat is on.’ He beams.

I am torn between an urge to listen to the Doctor and to stroke the cat. ‘If Marmaduke says it’s nearly finished, what harm is there?

Can we not just let this book knock up a couple more weird things

and then retire?’

The Doctor shakes his head. ‘No, no, no, no, no, no, no! We have

to find that book and stop it. I’ve a shrewd idea of the contents.

Believe me, the monsters only get bigger and nastier. Someone

could get hurt.’

‘What are we going to do?’ I ask, pottering to the kitchen and

pouring myself a fairly stiff measure.

When I return, the cat is fast asleep and the Doctor has gone.

The cat wakes me early. I can feel my skin burning worse than ever.

The urge to scratch is overwhelming. Marmaduke shakes his head.

‘He’s coming back,’ he says, and hops down from the bed. I lie

there, dozing, listening to the steady crunching of cat biscuits from the kitchen. Eventually, exhaustedly, I throw off the covers and

open the front door.

‘Ah,’ says the Doctor. For a man who’s been waiting outside, he

looks almost caught out. He puts his little screwdriver-y wand away and smiles. ‘Good morning. You’re up early.’

‘Marmaduke told me it was time to get up,’ I explain, then realise what I’ve just said, and it makes my brain melt a little.

The Doctor simply nods and, as his hair shifts, I’m almost certain I can hear an odd rustling of paper. ‘Ah. Well, we should hurry. The game’s somewhat afoot.’ He frowns and looks carefully at his

hands, as though baffled by what he’s just said. ‘Come on.’

I follow him down the stairs.

To be fair, I didn't expect the dragon. It bears down on us, breathing fire and tearing up vast chunks of lawn with its terrifying claws.

The Doctor pushes me hurriedly behind a burning bench and lies

next to me, panting with surprise and exhaustion as a fireball shoots over our heads.

'I see what you mean!' I shout. 'That's an actual dragon.' I reach for my phone.

'Calling the fire brigade?' he asks.

'No! Taking a picture!' I reach out with the phone, carefully. I

can hear the dragon close by, pawing up the turf and breathing like a rattling coalscuttle.

'Give me that!' snaps the Doctor, almost childishly grabbing the

phone off me. 'Didn't get a proper look at it earlier – on account of my hair being on fire.'

We both peer at the picture on my phone, till the Doctor drops it

sadly to the floor. 'I was worried more people would get hurt,' he sighs.

The most remarkable thing about the dragon was not that it

existed; it was that it had the head of Margaret's poor dog, wings made from old umbrellas, and the rotund body that had once

belonged to Margaret herself.

'This stops now,' says the Doctor. I say nothing. I'm torn

between the sickening sight in the garden and my cat, watching me

from the window, cleaning itself carefully.

'Where does the flame come from?' I ask.

'Page 178,' says the Doctor. 'To many people, Fire was a living

creature...'

The Doctor and Fire sit opposite each other.

‘How do you feel it’s gone?’ asks Fire.

The Doctor shrugs, seeming oblivious to the dancing light and the

sound of crackling paper. ‘Well, it seems too easy to say that I

always knew it would be you and me at the end.’

Fire gestures with a lazy arm. ‘It’s always been us, though, hasn’t it? I was there whenever you needed me. I was there for you at the Cave of Skulls, Pudding Lane, and all those churches and peace

conferences. I’ve been there. Good old Fire. But did you never think there was a time when I might need you?’

The Doctor smiles a quiet smile. ‘Not really. I never considered

you were alive. I still don’t.’

Fire stood, towering over the long-haired man, angry flames

burning at the edges of his jacket. ‘Did you never think that, one day, I would present you with my bill for services rendered?’

He reaches out a hand for the man who sits complacently in his

chair.

‘Fire?’ I laugh. ‘But that’s an element, isn’t it? It’s not alive.’

‘And it’s not really an element,’ the Doctor replies, dragging me

away from the bench, which is glowing cherry pink under the

dragon’s breath. ‘But to the book it’s merely something to create.’

He pats frantically at the smoking tail of his jacket. ‘And I assure you that it does a very good job.’ The two of us leap over a hedge, which bursts into flame.

The Doctor pulls out the tiny torch-y thing and starts to fiddle

with it. ‘If only I can target the frequency at which the bonds are made, perhaps I can reduce it back to its component parts. Ah-ha!’

He points the torch-y thing, and it emits a feeble glow.

Nothing happens.

The dragon snorts derisively.

We are already running for cover behind a bin when the dragon

spreads out its terrible wings and starts to flap, fanning belch after belch of flame at us as it lifts off the ground. ‘We are in so much trouble!’ I yell. To be honest, I say something else quite different.

The Doctor shakes his head calmly, and instead starts using his

screwdriver-wand on the door to the tool shed. He throws me inside onto a pile of grass-clippings and seizes the lid from an old bin, holding it like a shield. ‘I rather think it’s a matter of proximity,’ he mutters, ‘which could be tricky.’ He grabs a rake, and hurriedly ties his wand to it with twine until it looks a little like a spear. He appears to be humming an old hymn to himself. You know, the one

about knights being no more and the dragons being dead.

He advances out, a man ready to slay the dragon, soaring above

him like an old monster from a myth. Which it is, of course.

A flock of pigeons gives the Doctor a few extra seconds; the

birds’ plump, roasted bodies falling around him like hot coals. And then the dragon with the head of a dog turns its attention back to 11

him, roaring like a beast.

The Doctor doesn’t have a sword or armour, just a bin lid and that old rake. He calmly extends the rake and there is a tiny sound at the very edge of hearing. The dragon shrugs with its wings, beating him to the ground, and then spits flame around him, roaring as it

prepares for the kill, its claws of old chicken bones scouring the pavement. It laughs a dragon’s laugh, prepares to wrap the tiny man in fire, and then falls wetly into a pile of bits.

There is silence.

I crawl out from the lightly smouldering pile of grass clippings as the Doctor picks himself up, dusting pigeon feathers from his

clothes. He is laughing. ‘I think we’ve reached the end of a chapter,’ he says.

My cat leans out of the window. ‘Oh, well done, Doctor. I’d say that’s pretty much the end of the book.’

‘It’s not quite “Reader, I married him”, but it will have to do,’ the Doctor bows. ‘And where is the book?’

Marmaduke scratches idly at an ear. ‘Oh, it’s buried about three feet under that beech tree, and it’s very, very disappointed.’

‘Thank you,’ says the Doctor, smiling. ‘You can always rely on a cat to be on the winning side.’ He turns back to me. ‘There wouldn’t be a spade somewhere in that shed would there?’

The Doctor returns upstairs shortly afterwards, one of his jacket pockets bulging. The cat trots across the living room towards us, mildly interested. The Doctor watches me pour a dry sherry and smiles. ‘I wish you wouldn’t scratch,’ he says, handing me a couple of pills. ‘These will help with the itching. I suspect it’s all down to the book, but your GP will probably say it’s an allergic reaction.

Ah, well. No more sunbathing on the grass, just in case. Whatever you do, take lots of baths, apply plenty of calamine lotion and please don’t scratch. Really.’

His words don’t help. Every inch of my skin is hot and red and itches. Trying to ignore it, I sip my sherry and let the cat jump up onto my lap. ‘Wake me when it’s breakfast,’ he says. I close my eyes briefly. When I open them, hours later, the Doctor is gone.

Fire stands over the Doctor, flames spitting out from his collar.

‘I’ve always been there, Doctor, your constant companion.’

The Doctor shrugs. ‘I always worry the world will end in fire.’

Again, there is a rustle of paper.

Fire reaches out, a burning hand almost touching the Doctor. He doesn’t back away. ‘One day,’ says Fire, ‘you will ask me to burn everything. That’s going to cost.’

12

‘Really?’ The Doctor seems amused. ‘You seem the type to rather enjoy your work.’

Fire crackles dangerously, a smile on his cruel features. ‘Destruction is a good job. You should know.’

‘In fact,’ says the Doctor, reasonably, ‘I don’t quite understand why you should want to harm me if I’ve given you so much pleasure.’

Fire pauses, almost uncertain, and then grins like a lantern. ‘I am Fire. I bring death.’

‘Ah, yes,’ says the Doctor sadly. ‘I thought you might say something like that.’ He shifts in his chair, and again comes a faint noise of paper.

Fire rubs his hands, an action that throws off sparks into the corners of the room. ‘Come now, Doctor, are you ready for the final confrontation?’ The Doctor stands, a neat man, smiling his sad smile. ‘I will be an easy victory for you, Fire. And something of a disappointment.’

‘Explain,’ demands Fire.

‘Ah,’ says the Doctor. His eyes look suddenly so old and tired.

‘I’m not quite what you think I am. I’m in the book, too. Quite an early entry, and there’s not that much detail, but it seems to have

made a decent enough Doctor – using that poor man from Number

43. To be honest, I'm not even sure that I'm that good a copy.

'And this is where it ends,' he adds, looking at his delicate hands.

'The Doctor's not real. But wouldn't it be amazing if he were? I'm simply something thought up by the book. Another magical,

mythical creature.' And with that, he sits down again.

'We both are, I'm afraid.'

There is silence except for the gently threatening flicker of

burning embers from Fire.

The Doctor folds his arms. The rustle of creasing paper is

unmistakable.

Fire is furious with the truth and closes in on the Doctor. There is time for the Doctor to say one last thing: 'Ah well, I did tell you not to scratch...'

13

The Power Supply

Eddie Robson

An adventure of the First Doctor, with Steven and Vicki

You and I will never be able to see the true shape of history. Our limited sense of perception means we are simply not equipped for it.

But the shape is there, a vast and complex four-dimensional

network of peaks and troughs.

A blue box surfed over this network. Its systems could see this

shape in perfect detail. It happened upon a peak and something caught the ship's interests. So the TARDIS promptly materialised at it.

Prospects for the day were mixed. On the one hand, the war was

going well; on the other, productivity was down. Malven considered

these facts that headed up the daily report the Summariser had

prepared, then, ignoring the rest of the report, he moved onto his itinerary. He saw that he was due to question some prisoners who

had been captured in the mines the previous night and were being

detained on suspicion of espionage.

This, Malven decided, was definitely an interesting way to start

the day. He finished his early breakfast, then stepped into the

transport tube in the corner of his apartment (he decided not to fly today) and in less than two minutes Malven was in the holding cells at the Mining Hub. He would have been there sooner, but the traffic was bad today.

The robots – three of them, one on each door he had to pass

though to the cells – greeted him politely and told him how well he was looking. They verified his identity and let him through, the

light growing dimmer each time he passed a checkpoint. Finally

reaching the cell where the prisoners were being held, he saw there were three of them, an old man, a younger man and a young woman

– manacled to the far wall at their ankles, wrists and necks. Was this how they usually dealt with potential spies? Malven supposed it was appropriate.

‘At last, an actual person,’ said the younger man, a square-jawed

type with brown hair swept up from his forehead. He was simply

dressed in a sweater and beige trousers. ‘Maybe you’ll listen to

what we’ve got to say.’

‘We can but hope, my boy,’ said the older man. He had long,

white hair and a severity to his features. He was dressed in a black frock coat and trousers. Malven realised he was rather intimidated by the man. He had an air of fierce intelligence: if anything

untoward was going on, this man was almost certainly the ringleader.

'Is there any chance he could listen without us being shackled to a wall?' asked the young woman. She was wide-eyed and fresh-faced, with fair hair cut in a thick fringe and tied in short bunches at the sides. She seemed far too innocent to be a spy but, Malven realised, perhaps that was exactly what he was supposed to think.

Malven paused before speaking, noting that their dress seemed incredibly dated, like something out of a period vid. They appeared human, however, and a quick scan confirmed they were, or near enough.

'My name is Quosh Malven,' he told them. 'I am the Frontman here. What are your names?'

The young woman identified herself as Vicki and said that the young man was Steven and the older man was called the Doctor.

Malven's palm-held Veracitator indicated that she was telling the truth. He asked them a few basic calibration questions – what colour the walls were, how many fingers he was holding up, *et cetera* – which clearly tried their patience further but was necessary.

'Good,' said Malven. 'Now, why did you break into the mines?'

'We didn't,' said Steven.

'That is,' said Vicki, 'we didn't mean to.'

The Veracitator indicated neither answer was a lie. 'Go on,' he prompted.

'Our travel machine teleports over long distances,' Vicki continued. 'We took a random journey, that's all.'

The Doctor sniffed at this but said nothing.

‘And as soon as we stepped out of the TARDIS doors,’ Steven continued, ‘your robots pounced on us.’

‘Not literally,’ said Vicki. ‘They used a sort of force field.’

‘I should imagine he knows what the robots do,’ Steven said to her, then he looked back at Malven. ‘Anyway, they rounded us up and brought us here.’

Malven nodded. ‘And you had no intention of stealing from the mine, sabotaging it, spying on it, contaminating it or otherwise doing anything that would be detrimental to the war effort?’

The Doctor sighed. ‘We were merely curious about where we had landed and decided to take a look around. We don’t even know what or where this place is or even what it is you do here.’

Malven looked to Vicki and Steven. ‘And you both concur with your friend’s statement?’

‘Yes,’ they said together.

Malven checked the Veracitator.

‘Good,’ he said, and instructed the robots to release the prisoners.

Their restraints unclipped from their wrists, ankles and necks, then slowly retreated into the wall. The prisoners were obviously grateful at being able to move again.

‘That’s it?’ asked Steven.

‘Yes, I’m perfectly satisfied,’ said Malven. ‘The Veracitator confirms you are telling the truth, which is a great relief to me. I shouldn’t like to think our enemies could get in here. Would you

like something to eat?'

The Doctor, Steven and Vicki looked at each other in surprise.

'I wouldn't mind,' said Vicki.

Malven smiled. 'Come with me. We're nothing if not hospitable.'

He led the way and they followed.

'You, er, mentioned a war?' said the Doctor.

The planet was called Ca-Mon Green – at least, that's what the human colonists called it. The indigenous inhabitants had a different name, one that nobody could pronounce ('Or could be bothered to learn how to pronounce, I suspect,' the Doctor muttered to Vicki).

Malven explained this to the travellers as he led them to a staff area of the Hub, where he got the robots to lay on food and drink.

'Who are the original inhabitants?' asked Steven over a meal that he could recognise no parts of, but which tasted better than fine.

'We know them as the Kel-T,' replied Malven.

'Are any of them around?' asked Vicki.

'Oh, no,' said Malven, shaking his head. 'They're who we're at war with.'

Steven and Vicki glanced at each other, then at the Doctor, who put down his fork, picked up a napkin and wiped his mouth. Then he looked directly at Malven.

'Sir,' the Doctor began, 'do I understand that you have landed on this planet and commenced an aggressive campaign against its inhabitants?' He had kept his voice level, but the anger was unmistakable.

Malven held up a finger. ‘Technically, yes.’

The Doctor raised an eyebrow.

‘But the one didn’t follow on immediately from the other. We landed here, yes. But we made contact first. We established that there was space for us to build a colony. Agreements were signed. It was all very amicable.’

‘Until?’ said Steven.

‘They turned on us. Virtually overnight. The Kel-T thought the

land they’d allowed us to settle on had no value, but we discovered rich mineral resources here. We started mining and the Kel-T decided they wanted the land back. We tried to come to an arrangement, but relations broke down.’

‘Hmm,’ the Doctor said, going back to his food.

‘So those were the mines we were in,’ said Vicki.

‘We didn’t see what the robots were actually mining down there, did we?’ asked Steven. ‘So what are these mineral resources? What are you fighting over?’

‘Superpowers,’ said Malven.

The Doctor almost swallowed his fork.

Vicki kept stealing glances at the Doctor while Malven gave them a tour of the mine. She could see him restraining the urge to shout in the man’s face as it was clear that Malven’s understanding of the process was limited. The mines were fully automated and he had probably had the systems explained to him, by someone who had had it explained to them, and so on. The Doctor contented himself

by correcting some of Malven's errors (which Malven didn't seem

even slightly embarrassed by), but the Doctor's friends could

plainly see that he was dying to take the Frontman to task for his bland acceptance of the electric blue liquid that was being pumped up from the mineshaft as 'superpower'.

They reached an observation gantry set into the rock of the shaft.

Below them the mining robots scooted back and forth.

'So,' said Steven, raising his voice above the noise of the

machinery. 'You mine it, then what do you do with it?'

'I'll show you,' said Malven. He reached into his pocket and

pulled out a small glass flask. 'This is superpower in its refined form. Obviously, it must be filtered before it can be used.'

'Obviously,' said Vicki.

'Then you simply do this,' Malven said, removing the lid from

the flask, revealing a dropper. Tilting back his head and raising the dropper over his mouth, he let a few of the drops fall onto his

tongue. Then he leaned over the railing of the gantry, stretched out an arm and shot a bolt of light from his hand down at one of the

mining robots. One of its legs came clean off and bounced away

into a dark corner of the shaft.

'Oh!' cried Vicki in alarm.

'Don't worry,' Malven said. 'They repair each other. It'll be fixed in a few minutes.'

Two of the robot's fellows went over to it and led the unfortunate machine away, supporting the side that was now missing a limb.

'Was that really necessary?' asked Steven.

'It was an effective demonstration, I thought,' said Malven. 'Its

application in conflict is obvious, surely.'

'Was the robot hurt?' said Vicki.

'Of course not,' said Malven. 'It is simply aware of the urgent

need for repair and to avoid further damage.'

'That's a fair description of pain, wouldn't you say?' said Steven.

Malven looked at Steven with mild disdain. 'Anyway, that's not

the only thing the refined liquid allows you to do. With it we can fly and shield ourselves from attack. It really is an astonishing element.

Like magic.'

'Yes,' said the Doctor. 'It certainly appears to be nothing short of magical. But it is not.'

'What else would you call it?' said Malven.

'I would call it something else,' insisted the Doctor in a sharp

tone. 'I would examine it, establish its properties then call it

something else. I would not call it magic, sir, because to call it magic is to turn your back on logic and reason and basic curiosity about the universe. I would not call it magic because I would be

ashamed to call it magic!'

The Doctor turned on his heel and headed for the exit.

'That was quite some speech,' said Steven when he and Vicki were

back above ground and had caught up with the Doctor. They

strolled through the streets of the settlement. Colonists, powered by the substance that had come from the mine, soared gracefully over

their heads, leaped tall buildings with a single bound and ran past them at incredible speeds. Steven and Vicki were surprised by the

scale of the sprawling metropolis, as Malven had told them earlier that it had only been founded eight years ago.

'Where did that ridiculous man go?' asked the Doctor.

‘He said that he had other business to attend to,’ said Vicki. ‘I think you embarrassed him.’

‘Good,’ said the Doctor. ‘I can scarcely credit that he’s in charge. Is he the best they have?’

‘I thought he was going to throw as in the cells again,’ said Steven.

‘I’m sorry, my boy. I realise I was putting you both at risk, but I couldn’t listen to any more of his ignorant poppycock.’

‘He doesn’t seem especially strong-willed, does he?’ said Vicki. ‘For a leader, I mean.’

‘Quite so,’ said the Doctor. ‘I fear we have reached a profoundly depressing stage in human development – a stage far, far into both your futures. Decadence has set in. Have you noticed the devices everyone has attached to their necks? Those are neural inputs to the 18 central computer system. Effectively, the computer knows everything that happens and tells everyone what to do.’

‘So nobody has free will, you mean?’ asked Steven.

‘They have free will, they just don’t use it – they’ve lost the imagination to use it. Instead they let everything be run by computers, computers designed and built by other computers. No one knows how anything works any more. No one even wants to know!’

‘What do you think we should do?’ asked Steven. ‘Their war isn’t our business, surely?’

‘No, certainly not – if, as our friend Malven says, the planet’s

natives are indeed the aggressors. However, as no one seems curious about this substance, I feel a responsibility as a scientist to take an interest.' He placed a hand on Vicki's shoulder. 'But, er, you two may go back to the TARDIS, if you wish.'

'No, I'll stay,' Vicki replied. 'It seems safe enough in the settlement.'

They both looked at Steven, who was unimpressed. 'All right,' he said. 'If you're both staying, I suppose there's no harm in it.'

Malven returned to his apartment to realise that, although he had mainly claimed to have business to attend to as an excuse to get away from the newcomers, he really did have business to attend to. The afternoon report had arrived early, prompted by a pressing piece of news.

The central computer predicted the war would be won today.

Malven's eyes flickered back and forth across the report. There were statistics and maps linked to it, explaining why speedy victory had suddenly become inevitable and that the enemy Kel-T were retreating in several key areas. The report recommended Malven press for a total surrender to create the cleanest victory and gain the upper hand in the inevitable peace settlement. It laid out possible strategies for negotiation, which Malven read gratefully. After all, he himself had no experience of such things.

The Doctor heard the news a couple of hours later. He'd fetched some equipment from the TARDIS and requested a sample of the substance from the mine. Vicki and Steven were surprised when Malven acceded to the request after the Doctor's earlier outburst, but the Doctor had a knack for assuming authority over people, especially those who technically possessed authority but had next-

to-no idea of how to use it.

The initial tests told the Doctor very little. The substance was

absorbed by human cells, without need for digestion. It could just as
19

easily be rubbed onto the skin. It was versatile, and the Doctor

established it could combine with the cell structures of various

creatures. The Doctor took great care, however, to ensure that he

did not come into contact with it himself. He had no doubt that the substance could not give the colonists the powers they had

displayed. Their ability to fly defied aerodynamics, and their

'energy bolts' surely needed some *source* of energy, yet the colonists did not appear drained by their efforts. There was no clear process of cause and effect, which meant he was missing part of the process – and so was everyone else.

To his annoyance, he was interrupted in his work by an

announcement.

Steven and Vicki heard the news while they were watching a

highlights programme of the past week in the war on a large screen at some kind of administration centre. They'd stumbled on the place after wandering through the colony, walking from the churned-up

land of the mines at one end to the dark greens of the landscape on the other side. What seemed like dark-hued grass turned out, on

closer inspection, to be a kind of moss. They headed back to the

centre and joined the colonists watching the latest news from the

frontline.

The footage came from dozens of angles, cut together at a

dizzying pace. Vicki felt queasy watching it, and not simply

because of the speed of the cutting. The footage appeared to be

drawn from the experiences of those doing the fighting, reading their minds and recording events from their perceptions. Steven and Vicki sat amid a crowd of interested onlookers who cheered their fellows on. The crowd was particularly enthusiastic about a general named Jay Stantin, a young, handsome man who was interviewed at length about a skirmish that had resulted in the utter destruction of an enemy unit.

The Kel-T were fighting from within mechanical suits, only differentiated by sequences of shapes on the front, so it was impossible to get a clear view of what they looked like, but Vicki could just about see purple, wizened faces behind their visors. She slowly realised the shapes on the suits were a language: the Kel-T were marked with their names, or perhaps some kind of serial number, presumably for easy identification if one of them was hit.

The TARDIS travellers could understand spoken language everywhere they went, but written language was harder. As she concentrated on the inscriptions, Vicki gradually started to gain some understanding of them. The humans zoomed around the screen in bright uniforms, flying at their targets and loosing energy 20 bolts like the ones they'd seen Malven shoot in the mine. They deflected enemy attacks with ease. Some had mastered the ability to fire laser beams from their eyes. Others were capable of performing remarkable feats of strength: one managed to lift an enemy vehicle, a sort of tank, completely unaided, while another took an enemy's gun from its hands and twisted it into scrap. The humans had assembled an army of superheroes. It was awe-inspiring and not a little terrifying.

Then something flashed before Vicki's eyes. One of the Kel-T,

being gunned down, caught her attention. ‘Steven! Look!’ she hissed urgently. ‘That one there, from the other side. I’ve seen him – or her, or it – before.’

‘Really? They all look the same to me.’

‘No, they’ve got their names, or something like names, on the front of those battle suits. I saw that one before, and I think he was being shot. He seemed dead.’

‘Maybe they used the same clip again?’

‘I don’t think so,’ said Vicki. ‘It seemed different.’

Steven was disconcerted when the programme concluded with a preview of what to expect from the war in the coming week. ‘This is basically all their tactics,’ he said. ‘They’re just announcing them publicly? What if there’s a spy? It’s not as if they checked us out very thoroughly before deciding we weren’t spies. We could easily be spies.’

‘Shh!’ hissed Vicki.

‘What are they going to do even if they do hear me? Nobody seems terribly vigilant.’ In front of them, the screen flashed a breakdown of the gains they expected to make in the coming week.

‘This is bizarre,’ said Steven.

‘Maybe it’s a bluff Spreading misinformation.’

‘Then they’re not doing it very subtly. How are they even winning this war? Either the other side is incompetent, in which case they were idiots to start the war in the first place, or –’

It was then that the highlights were interrupted for a special announcement. The afternoon schedule had been cleared to make

way for coverage of the end of the war. The humans were going to win today.

The war was concluded with the symbolic destruction of an empty Kel-T outpost. The surrender had been negotiated half an hour earlier, but this was felt to be lacking in visual interest, so a final attack was staged and the official surrender followed directly afterward, the Kel-T marching in front of the ruins and shining a white light.

21

The watching crowd was aware of the staged nature of the display, but felt it an appropriate catharsis after several arduous months of conflict. The Doctor broke off from his studies to join Steven and Vicki watching the homecoming parade for the humans' army. Dozens of them flew overhead in formation, waving to the crowds below. Others rode through the streets in a float with Stantin at the back, who earned the loudest cheer from the crowd. Steven told the Doctor about the lack of security concerning the humans' tactics.

'You don't think –?' Vicki started, then broke off.

'What is it, my dear?' asked the Doctor.

'This doesn't have anything to do with us, does it? The humans winning, I mean?'

'What do you mean?'

'I just wondered. This war goes on for months, and then the day we turn up, it ends.'

'It's a coincidence, surely?' said Steven.

‘Quite a big one,’ said Vicki. ‘I can’t see what we’ve done to change anything, but have we changed things just by being here?’

‘It’s an interesting question,’ the Doctor replied. ‘Yes, perhaps we do disturb the equilibrium when we arrive. Or perhaps we are drawn to such points in history’s pattern? Perhaps history distracts us from our natural course and brings us to these moments?’

‘That sounds suspiciously like an excuse for the fact that you never manage to get us where we’re meant to be going,’ said Steven.

The Doctor glared, then turned his attention back to the parade. Most of the colony’s one hundred and twenty thousand citizens attended the celebrations that evening, along with the three travellers. The Doctor managed to get a few minutes to speak with Stantin – no mean feat, as everybody was clamouring for his attention.

‘Could I ask you to participate in some tests?’ the Doctor said.

‘What sort of tests?’ Stantin asked, obviously aggrieved that the Doctor had not first congratulated him on the victory.

‘I’m concerned about the long-term effects of, er... superpowers on the human body.’

Stantin frowned. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Well, like any drug –’

‘It isn’t a drug,’ Stantin snapped.

The Doctor smiled. ‘You seem very certain of that, young man.’

‘A drug taps into the body’s own properties, enhances or

suppresses them,' said Stantin. 'This is different It lets you do

things you couldn't otherwise do. It's clear that this substance

imbues us with properties of its own.'

'But don't you see,' the Doctor countered, 'that what you have

just described is –'

He broke off because suddenly Stantin was sweating and

coughing. The man bent at the waist, placing his hands on his

knees.

'Are you all right?' said the Doctor.

Stantin was coughing too hard to answer, but he nodded and

waved a hand to indicate that he was fine. He stopped coughing and spat on the floor.

The Doctor looked affronted at this indecorous display, but only

for a moment. Then he noticed just what Stantin had spat out.

Against the grey stone floor on which they stood, it was clear that the spittle was blue.

The Doctor and Stantin looked at each other.

Then, abruptly, Stantin doubled over and vomited. A torrent of

pure electric blue liquid streamed from his mouth and refused to

stop. The look in his eyes was one of helplessness, incomprehension and fear.

'Help!' the Doctor shouted. 'We need help here – and quickly!'

Malven ran over, letting out a cry of alarm. 'What happened to

him? What did you do?'

'Nothing,' insisted the Doctor. 'But we need to do something!'

Stantin was now lying on the floor, the fluid continuing to pour from his mouth and starting to leak from his eyes, nostrils and ears. Around him the revellers were displaying increasing consternation at the scene playing out before their eyes – and then shouts coming from short distances away gave the Doctor his first clue that Stantin was not the only one affected.

Stantin's death had been a terrible sight. The colour had drained from his face and he seemed to age rapidly, with his skin becoming pale and thin. The Doctor examined him and discovered his body had been drained of blood, his internal organs were damaged beyond repair and his bones were brittle.

To the Doctor's horror, but perhaps not to his surprise, the substance that had poured from Stantin's body was indeed the same material that had come from the mines. 'How much of it would he have ingested, over all that time?' the Doctor asked Malven.

'I've no idea,' Malven replied.

'How much would he have taken in on average?'

'Er,' hesitated Malven, 'I think the standard daily dose is one or two millilitres.'

'Over how long?' asked the Doctor.

'The war lasted 273 days.' Malven knew this because it was clearly marked on the daily reports.

'Even assuming he ingested two millilitres a day – that's a little over half a litre in total. The quantity that poured from his body was considerably more than that. Judging by eye, I'd also say that it was far more liquid than the human body usually contains.'

'What are you saying?' asked Malven.

‘Some kind of process was triggered in his body which not only used all the available fluid, but which drew on the energy in his body to grow. You see, I missed something very important when I was examining this substance.’

‘What?’ said an increasingly frantic Malven.

‘It’s alive,’ the Doctor replied. ‘It was dormant for a long time. Now it’s very much active, I’m afraid.’

‘Why?’

‘I should have thought that was obvious,’ the Doctor said.

Thousands of the colonists had already been affected and more were suffering all the time. The effect in all cases was the same: an attack resulted in an outpouring of super-fluid, then death in short order.

‘We’ve got out computers working on the problem,’ said Malven, watching anxiously as the Doctor gathered samples from sufferers.

‘Computers are only as good as the information they have to work with,’ the Doctor said. ‘I doubt your computers have the capability to resolve this problem. Not before your colony perishes.’

‘It’s identified a correlation between who’s been affected and how much of the substance they ingested,’ Malven said defensively.

‘I assume it’s affected those who ingested the most first?’

Malven nodded.

‘Your computer might like to concentrate on scanning for signals,’ the Doctor said. ‘The timing of the outbreak suggests to me that it’s been activated in some way. It could be a broadcast signal, or a chemical agent released into the air. Whatever it is, if we can find out then it’s possible we may be able to block it.’ He looked up and saw Malven’s gaze was firmly fixed upon him.

‘Doctor,’ said Malven. ‘Can you stop this?’

‘I hope so,’ the Doctor said. ‘You were fortunate that I arrived

when I did.’

‘Yes,’ said Malven, then paused. ‘Unless you caused all this?’

‘Ah,’ said the Doctor as he finished collecting his samples and

walked through to the laboratory that had been set up for him.

‘Well, with the situation you’re in, I’m afraid you’ll have to trust me. You can, of course, wait instead for your computer to do

nothing very much and your colony to perish.’ Malven looked at the floor.

Steven found Vicki in Malven’s office at the administrative centre, poring over a small screen.

‘The Doctor’s still working on a way to stop it,’ said Steven.

‘I’m sure he’ll find a way,’ said Vicki without looking up.

‘What are you doing?’

‘Look at this, Steven. Remember how I thought I’d seen the same

person from the other side die twice on that footage?’

‘What of it?’

‘I’ve found the two clips. Look. I was right. The designation on

the suit is the same in each case.’

‘Couldn’t it just be that two people have the same name?’

‘I’ve looked closely at his face, and at some of the others – I’m

sure it’s the same person. Anyway, look at this. I’ve told the

computer to search all its footage and look for other occurrences of that designation in their footage of the war.’

‘And?’

‘I’ve found more than thirty. He dies in all of them. And that’s not all.’

‘What else?’

‘I tried to find out just how much damage those energy bolts do, so I looked up whether that robot in the mines had been repaired yet. And you know what I found?’

‘What?’

‘One of the robots was reported as having sustained damage today – its leg had been broken off. It was sent back to the robot repair shop. But the shop couldn’t find anything wrong with it. The leg was still attached. It was working perfectly.’

Malven hovered nearby as the Doctor completed his examination of the test subjects. The Doctor said ‘Hmm,’ nodded and held up two phials. ‘This one halts the reproduction of the substance,’ he said, indicating the one which contained a dark brown liquid. ‘This one,’ he said, pointing to one filled with clear liquid, ‘flushes it from the body. See that any sufferers are treated immediately for extreme dehydration, and you may need to carry out blood transfusions as well.’

Malven grasped them gratefully and sent them for immediate mass synthesis. The Doctor treated Malven personally with what he had left over.

‘You were right, by the way,’ Malven told the Doctor.

‘About what, exactly?’

‘Shortly before the outbreak began, a signal started broadcasting. The computer confirms that it could have had the effect you suggested.’

‘And from where did this signal originate?’

‘The Kel-T, we think.’

‘I’m certain. It’s clear to me that –’

He was interrupted because Vicki and Steven had entered the room. Vicki immediately started to agitate for the Doctor’s attention – not that he’d had any intention of withholding it.

‘Calm down, my dear! Now, what is it you’ve discovered?’

‘The superpowers don’t really work,’ she said. ‘They’re an illusion.’

‘I had just about come to much the same conclusion,’ the Doctor said. ‘But do you have evidence of this?’

‘This is nonsense,’ said Malven. ‘I’ve experienced them for myself I showed you –’

‘Oh yes,’ said Steven. ‘Your little demonstration with the robot? It was never damaged. The central computer called it in for repair, but when it got there it was fine. We’ve all been seeing things. You, me, everybody– the entire colony!’

‘Yes!’ said the Doctor. ‘A shared hallucination. Simple and elegant.’

‘But we’ve been using this power to fight against the Kel-T,’ Malven argued unconvincingly.

‘No, you haven’t,’ said Vicki. ‘You haven’t at all. They go out

there and let you think you're fighting them. Really, you're doing nothing. You see them die, but they don't. They get up, come back and pretend to fight again.'

'And your computer relies on the information you feed it,' said Steven. 'It's effectively been conspiring against you.'

'I think it's clear,' said the Doctor, 'that the Kel-T have been generating this mass hallucination to make you ingest more of the substance you've been mining. Inside human bodies it incubates and multiplies. They wanted you to keep on drinking it. You have helped them to make more of it. The substance is seeping through the streets even now. No doubt the plan is that you will all die out, then they will come to collect it.'

'What is it really, that stuff?' asked Vicki.

'I don't know,' the Doctor said. 'But whatever it is, it seems to be valuable enough to them to make it worth going to all this effort.'

'But this is appalling!' said Malven. 'They let us settle here when all along they were planning to do this?'

The Doctor turned to face him. 'I agree that it is quite an appalling way to behave. But is it any worse than the manner in

which you have behaved? Not only have you embarked on hostilities against people whom you should have been grateful towards, you have fallen for their trick by means of your own wilful ignorance! My young friends here have exposed it in the space of a day.'

'Actually, Vicki did most of the work,' confessed Steven.

'Increasingly on my travels,' the Doctor continued, 'I find myself pressed into situations where I feel compelled to take a moral

position, and so it is here. And I feel that my only option is to

declare that neither side is in the right. I cannot in all conscience help either of you any further.'

Malven stared at the Doctor open-mouthed. 'Then what do we

do?' he shouted.

'I suggest you leave,' the Doctor replied. 'That, at any rate, is

what I intend to do.'

He left the room. Steven and Vicki followed him.

'I might,' he said as he walked away, 'suggest to the Kel-T,

however, that they never attempt anything like this again.'

Two hundred and eighteen years after the humans left Ca-Mon Green, the patch of land where they had made their settlement looked much as it had before they left. The buildings had been dismantled and their materials recycled. The mines had long been filled in. The moss had grown back over every inch of bare ground.

Yet the vital fuel on which everything on the planet depended was

running low again. Campaigns encouraging moderation had failed.

Instead, a probe had been drawn to the planet from a race that fitted the same profile as the humans and was also seeking to establish a colony in this sector of space. Today the rulers of Ca-Mon Green

would make contact and make a generous offer of land to these aliens.

Many Kel-T were unhappy with their rulers' decision, feeling it

immoral. But what could they do? This was how their government

had decided to deal with the shortage, and the rulers had convinced the majority that their way of life depended on the plan. A meeting of Kel-T agitators gathered to prepare for a protest later that day, which would inevitably result in them being arrested. Their consciences

demanded they offer even this token resistance, although they all

knew that it was doomed to failure.

The meeting was interrupted by a strange noise and the appearance of a large blue box. A door opened inwards and out stepped a young man – he looked much like the humans who had lived here briefly – dressed in cream and beige.

'Oh, how do you do?' said the young man, speaking their language perfectly. 'I'm the Doctor.'

27

What Has Happened to the

Magic of 'Doctor Who'?

II

Gareth Roberts

Mr Innes Lloyd,

BBC Producer, 'Doctor Who'

19th February 1967

Dear Mr Lloyd,

I'm quite angry, Mr Lloyd. What have you done to the magic of 'Doctor Who'?

Since you took over as producer the programme has gone from bad to worse. Under the previous producers Verity Lambert and John Wiles, 'Doctor Who' was special. You never knew where the good Doctor would end up next, or what kind of adventure he would find himself in. We would go from comedy in the Wild West to high-flying space adventures with the Chumblies, from the horrors of the massacre of St Bartholomew's Eve to the jungles of Kembel with the Daleks and their alien alliance. Every story

brought something new, often in a new style.

Since you got your feet under the table, however, just before the Doctor changed his face, the series has changed, too. The Doctor himself, let me remind you, is an explorer, a scientist – not a hero. His motivation was always to get back to the Tardis if there was any danger, and the adventures only happened because for some reason or other (fallen masonry, or its power was drained, or one of the girls had been kidnapped by Moslems or something) he couldn't. He always said he was an observer and could not – MUST NOT – interfere. Since you took over the programme, he has become a moral, avenging hero. In last night's instalment he told Ben and Polly that 'we must fight the terrible things in the universe' or words to that effect. This is not what the Doctor or 'Doctor Who' the television serial are about, Mr Lloyd.

On top of this, the Doctor's helpers now look like pop stars and wear mini-skirts. Yes, even the boys! Steven the pilot and Vicki the 28 space orphan were real people – Ben, Polly *et al* are merely decorative sidekicks. Since your first credit on 'Doctor Who' in the Monoid story, Mr Lloyd, there has been a much greater display of female flesh on screen. Dolly birds are not what we watch 'Doctor Who' for, sir. And neither are monsters! Every story nowadays seems to be about fighting a B-film style alien invasion – War Machines, Daleks and now these inane Cybermen. Where is the variety of setting and style? Where are the adventures in history that are so much a part of 'Doctor Who'? Take note, Mr Lloyd. Please return 'Doctor Who' to its proper state before people stop watching or turn their knobs to ITV in their droves. I already have!

Mrs Janet Trent, Ipswich, Suffolk

What Has Happened to the Magic of 'Doctor Who'? continues on page 60

29

Favourite Star

Ian Farrington

An adventure of the Second Doctor

CAPRICORN

A chance meeting on public transport this week will lead to a new friendship and perhaps a revelation – but isn't it something you suspected all along?

*** * * *THIS WEEK'S LUCKY COLOURS – red and blue* * * ***

Tuesday

'There is a good service on the Jubilee Line,' chimed the automatic announcement.

'I'll be the judge of that,' Miranda Peel thought, just like she did every time she heard that announcement. She walked down to the

far left end of the London Underground platform – she could

usually get on the train more easily there. There were fewer people at that end.

Miranda looked up at the electronic timetable. The next train was

only a minute away. Good, she thought. Assuming there were no

delays, she could catch the 18.01 train from London Bridge.

While she waited, she took out her copy of *24/7* magazine and, folding the page back on itself, checked her horoscope. It was a new issue, which Tony had only given to her that morning.

Miranda had read the horoscopes page already, of course. It was

the first thing she looked at when she got hold of an issue. The

pages about Jennifer Aniston and Charlotte Church and all the

others, she just scanned them, if she were honest. She made a half-hearted effort of reading the whole thing – she just didn't get all that celebrity nonsense. But the magazine's horoscopes were a different thing altogether. Of every publication she'd ever read, *24/7*'s were the best.

She looked up as the train sped past her before slowing to a stop.

The doors opened and Miranda got on. It was busy, as was usual at

this time of the day, but she spotted a spare seat. It was at the far end of the carriage, next to the door that led to the driver's cab at the rear of the whole train. Miranda took it, mumbling apologies to other commuters as she brushed past them to reach it.

The doors hissed closed and, for a moment, she thought she saw

her next-door neighbour running onto the platform but she was

distracted but the teenager in the seat opposite chewing gum, with annoying thumping music coming from his headphones. Um-chaum-cha-um-chaum-cha. Next to him – Miranda knew she shouldn't

spy on the passengers around her, but she couldn't help it – was a woman about Miranda's age, reading a book. Miranda recognised

the cover from work. They had a fair amount of romantic novels at

Fly's Bookshop, and she spotted this as one of last year's

bestsellers.

The man sat next to Miranda, to her left, was more difficult to spy on. She turned her head, pretending to look up the carriage, but she was trying to take a snapshot in her mind of the man in the blue-and-red patterned seat. He was older than Miranda – maybe in his

fifties – and looked as if he was on his way to a fancy-dress party.

Checked trousers, big coat (and in this heat), oversized collar. He had floppy hair, like a mop-top.

More than anything else, Miranda was struck by his expressive

face. She'd been using the Tube for fifteen years, ever since finishing university and moving to London, and it had been always been the same. Commuters generally kept quiet, didn't talk, not wanting anyone else intrude into their personal space on the train. She did it herself. Everyone obeyed the unspoken rule that travelling by Tube was such a grind that no one should make it worse by being human. Tourists were different – they laughed and joked and spoke loudly in a myriad of languages, some she could only guess at They hadn't had the time to learn the rules.

But this man was grinning. Not an inane grin, though, or a suspicious one. Miranda didn't for one minute think he was strange or dangerous or mentally ill. It was the smile of someone quite, quite happy with the world. She felt something close to envy.

'Hello,' he said, turning to her with the same smile. With a shock, Miranda realised she'd been staring at him and blushed furiously.

She looked away – the woman with the book was standing up, ready to alight at Green Park. The feeling of embarrassment stayed with Miranda and she flushed an even deeper red. She looked back at the man nervously.

'I'm so sorry,' she said. 'I, I –'

'That's quite all right,' he said, holding out a hand, expecting it to be shook. Miranda looked at it as if it was about to bite her. 'I'm the Doctor.' His voice was low but strong, not quite a whisper but quiet enough that she was fairly sure that only he and Miranda could hear. And still that grin: warm, friendly and reassuring.

Miranda shook his hand tentatively.

‘I’m sorry,’ she said again. ‘I didn’t mean to stare. I wasn’t staring – oh, I’m sorry.’

‘Please stop apologising, you’ll make me embarrassed,’ the Doctor said as the train pulled away from Green Park. ‘It’s very nice to meet you. I’ve been here all day and, do you know, I haven’t met anyone I’ve wanted to talk to’

Miranda smiled. ‘You can talk to me if you like.’

The Doctor was so nice, so instantly friendly. He wasn’t from London, that much was clear, but he was hardly a tourist. Miranda found him fascinating. A few months ago, she would never have had the courage to talk to a stranger. Not before the horoscopes had changed her life.

‘You are kind,’ said the Doctor.

‘Where are you going?’ asked Miranda. Still, even after all the changes in her life over the last year, she wasn’t used to striking up conversations.

‘I’m not quite sure,’ he said, pausing. ‘I’m here with some young friends of mine, but I rather sensed they were in the mood to explore London without an old fuddy-duddy like me hanging around.’ He laughed to himself. ‘Jamie got cross with me when I tried to explain to him how the London Eye worked so I suggested they have a wander for the afternoon. I bought them each a one-day travelcard and a map, and we arranged to meet this evening in Greenwich. That’s where my transport is.’

‘Are you here for long?’

‘Who knows? That’s the exciting bit. We travel, you see. Never

stay in any one place for too long. We arrived this morning and, for once, no great calamity seemed to befall us within the first hour, so I said we should explore. I've always loved London, haven't you?'

The train pulled into Westminster, and Miranda found herself smiling like a Cheshire cat as the Doctor told her all about the station. He explained it was the deepest Underground station, and seemed to know a fair bit about the Tube's history.

'Its name means what it says, you know,' he said, leaning in excitedly. 'The "minster" bit is from the Old English "mynster", meaning church or monastery. And it's to the west of traditional London. Isn't that fun?' Miranda could see how the Doctor's friend must have felt, having history explained to him when presumably all he wanted to do was go to the HMV on Oxford Street or play football in Hyde Park, but she didn't mind. It was wonderful to listen to the Doctor talk. He spoke so passionately, so interestingly. It was like a really good episode of *QI*, she thought. When he told Miranda about Westminster station's grand opening, on Christmas Eve 1868, he spoke so evocatively, he sounded as if he'd been

there.

'So,' he said. 'What about you? You haven't even told me your name.'

'Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm Miranda. Miranda Peel.'

'That's a nice name. And what do you...' The Doctor looked across the carriage, out of the window. 'Oh, my!'

Miranda looked too. They were pulling into Canary Wharf, three

stations beyond her stop. She laughed. ‘I should have got off at London Bridge!’ she said. ‘I should get out here and catch the train back.’

‘Come along,’ said the Doctor. He grabbed her hand and they dashed off the train before its doors closed.

‘You need to stay on until Greenwich, don’t you?’ said Miranda.

‘Don’t worry about that,’ he said. ‘This is my fault, keeping you talking. It’s only six o’clock. I have an hour or so until I have to meet the others.’ His eyes narrowed in mock seriousness. ‘What do you say, Miranda, to a cup of coffee? I must confess, I’m rather enjoying your company.’

She was taken aback, and again she felt her cheeks flush. Was he coming on to her? No, she didn’t think so – he seemed too innocent, too genuinely friendly. At any rate, she’d known as soon as he’d asked that she’d say yes. She’d enjoyed their conversation, and over the last year or so her confidence had grown so much. She now felt able to take decisive action.

She’d miss tonight’s *The ONE Show*, though. She’d have to catch it on iPlayer.

‘Yes, Doctor,’ she said. ‘That sounds nice. I’d rather have a glass of wine, though, if that’s alright?’

‘Wonderful! Come on. Let’s see what Canary Wharf is really like in 2009. It used to be such a prosperous dock, you know.’

They climbed the escalators into the station’s expansive ticket hall, then out into the daylight. It wasn’t warm, and Miranda pulled her coat tight around her.

The Doctor was looking around, fascinated by the architecture and the docks. Miranda didn’t come to Docklands very often – it

always seemed too space-age, too bright and gleaming. She

preferred her London to be old and full of history – the Burlington Arcade, the façade of St Pancras station and the Baker Street Tube.

'Oh, my.' The Doctor was impressed. 'I haven't been here for a

long time. A long time.' He was talking to himself, Miranda

realised. 'Yes, I was with Susan and the others, wasn't I? Dreadful business.' He then shook his head, clearing the memory, turned to

Miranda, and smiled. 'Come on.'

They found a very nice wine bar a short walk from the station. As

Miranda could have guessed, it was full of people in their twenties, mostly men wearing expensive suits and drinking expensive drinks.

Canary Wharf was like that – all the banking firms in the area had turned what was once east London's bustling docks into a 21st-century version of *Wall Street*.

None of this bothered the Doctor, or it seemed that way, even

though he looked completely out of place. As Miranda sat at a table, she watched him wait patiently behind throngs of people at the bar.

City types pushed in front of him more than once. The Doctor was

frustrated, Miranda could see, but didn't say anything. When his

turn came, he leant over the bar so the barman could hear him.

Then, when it came to pay, he got out a small purse, and pushed

coins around it until he found a large, round coin, noticeably bigger than a two-pound piece. The barman blanked him when he tried to

pay with it, causing the Doctor to go back to the purse to find the right coins.

'He wouldn't accept a five-pound coin,' the Doctor said as he

came to the table. 'I thought they'd be in by now.' He gave Miranda

her red wine and sipped his coffee.

There was loud music – Miranda didn't recognise it– so they sat close to each other so they could talk. She told him all about Fry's, the bookshop near Baker Street where she'd worked for eleven years. She liked it, she said. She'd always loved books and the hours were good. The pay wasn't great, but it was enough.

'It must be wonderful. All those books,' the Doctor said. 'All that knowledge, all that great literature.'

'It was in my stars,' said Miranda, sipping at her wine. 'They always said I'd end up surrounded by things I love.'

The Doctor laughed. Then, perhaps sensing Miranda was serious, he frowned.

'Your stars? What do you mean?'

'My horoscope.'

'I wouldn't pay those too much attention.'

'Sceptical, are you, Doctor?'

'One should be sceptical about everything, I've found. At least until you have all the facts to hand, at any rate.'

For the first time since she had met him, Miranda's connection with the Doctor was shaken. She was used to being mocked for her confidence in her horoscopes. That's why she never brought it up in conversation. She'd known Gillian at work for seven years and she had no idea that Miranda took them so seriously. She'd told Tony when he'd offered her free copies of *24/7*, of course, but he'd just smiled and never mentioned it again. Having the Doctor question it was a blow, however. In less than half an hour he had become her

friend, they'd got on so well. What was he thinking of her now?

'Oh, dear,' said the Doctor. 'I can see I've offended you.'

'No,' she said, trying to brush it off 'Not at all. I'm, I've –' She stopped. 'Look, I'm sorry. It's just that I've spent my whole life reading horoscopes and living my life by what they say, and I've

spent my whole life putting up with jokes about it, and the snide

comments and people looking at me as if I'm stupid. No one does

that if you say you're a Christian, or if you believe there's bacteria on Mars, do they?'

The Doctor looked apologetic. 'No, you're quite right. I'm sorry,

Miranda. Tell me about them.'

'Pardon?'

'Your horoscopes. Tell me about them.'

'They're a guide, I suppose. That's the best way of putting it.

They help me work things out. Think life through. What to do

sometimes. Ever since I can remember, I've read them in one paper

or magazine or other. You've got to pick one and stick with it, you see. Like lottery numbers. I know it sounds silly, Doctor.' She took a large swill of her wine. 'And I know what you're dying to say.'

'What's that, Miranda?'

'Why do I pick just one horoscope? If they're true, if they're

worth reading, then shouldn't they all say the same thing? But

people don't listen to all the vicars in the world, do they? They pick one they like or admire, or just the local one, and he guides them, looks out for them. He's there for them. And that's what horoscopes are like.'

The Doctor finished his coffee, looking puzzled.

'And they help you? You feel better because you read them?'

‘Yes. Yes, I do. Especially since I’ve been reading *24/7*.’

‘I’m sorry?’ asked the Doctor.

‘Well, I’ll admit there have been ups and downs over the years, Doctor.’ Miranda could feel herself becoming tipsy. She wasn’t used to a glass of wine after work, but it was helping her open up.

‘My life hasn’t been easy. I don’t suppose anyone’s is. I know lots of people look as though they sail through life, barely touching the sides, but I think they’re just better at hiding it than the rest of us.

‘I’ve never been one for the mechanics of horoscopes – Venus in retrograde and all that. But then I’ve barely a clue idea how a television works. It doesn’t stop me enjoying *Cranford*, does it? Anyway, I’ve always believed in them. I suppose, like any form of belief, you take the rough with the smooth. There have been times when my horoscope has given me, well, bad advice, I suppose many people would call it.

‘When I was 17, *The Daily Mirror* told me to take a risk. So I 35 applied for a performing arts degree at Keele. And I got in. And I hated it. I loathed every single minute. Only lasted a year. I should’ve gone after the first term. Ended up transferring to Manchester to read literature, which is what I always wanted to do anyway. “Take a risk”. I should have just put money on the Grand National or something. Recently, though, things have been going very well. Ever since *24/7*.’

The Doctor had been listening attentively. Those deep, soulful eyes managing to be both enquiring and worried at the same time.

‘I don’t know what that is,’ he said.

‘ *24/7*? It’s a magazine, a celebrity magazine. You know the thing

– full of interviews with people like Tess Daly and photos of Lily Allen out walking her dog.’

‘You don’t sound impressed.’

‘It’s not really my cup of tea. I only read it because the man who lives next door works for the company that makes it. He gives me a free copy every week. When he first did it, I smiled politely and

pretended to be grateful, you know.’ Miranda laughed,

remembering when Tony offered her that first issue. ‘I think he

thought that because I’m a woman in my thirties I must be

fascinated by *Big Brother* and Cheryl Cole.

‘But what did fascinate me was the horoscopes page. It was a

revelation. At that time, I was making do with the horoscope in our local free rag. It was okay, I suppose, but it was very short and

some weeks they’d just forget to print it. But *24/7*’s page just spoke to me. I’ve been reading it for about a year now and in that time

I’ve really started to get my life in order. I’ve got more friends. I go out. I socialise. I’m more confident. Look, I know it sounds silly, but when I wake up each morning…’ Miranda paused.

‘Yes?’ asked the Doctor.

‘Well, I’m in a good mood. Before this last year, I didn’t even

know that was possible. I used to be quite a miserable person.’

‘I find that hard to believe.’

Miranda giggled to herself ‘You wouldn’t have recognised me! I

was shy, dowdy, not remotely ambitious. I swear I was a walking

cliché from a *Bridget Jones* rip-off. Now I live my life to the full.

That’s good, isn’t it?’

‘And it’s because of *24/7*? Why is this one so good?’

Miranda paused. Should she tell the Doctor? He was hiding his

worry about her, but not well enough for her not to spot it. And he didn't entirely approve of the whole horoscopes thing.

'Over the last year, I've become increasingly certain the

horoscopes are talking to me. I mean, really talking to me. It's like no one else reads the page. One week, I booked a holiday, just a few 36

days in Cumbria, nothing special, and the next week in *24/7*, the horoscopes was all "Now you've made your summer plans", and so

on. Another time, it told me to apply for a promotion that I was

certain there were other people better qualified for. My horoscope told me, "If you undervalue yourself, so will others. Go for that job

– it's yours for the taking." And I walked the interview, walked it.

My – now – boss was so pleased I'd applied. She was almost certain I wouldn't, thinking I was happy enough in the job I was in.'

'Miranda –' the Doctor shifted in his chair '– I know it seems like the magazine is talking to you, but it could just be a coincidence.'

'But it's happened too many times. And the horoscope gives me

advice – tells me how to behave. No, that's not right, not right at all.

It gives me the confidence so I can behave how I want to.'

The Doctor didn't look happy. He stared silently at Miranda, like

a concerned uncle. Then he took a fob watch from his pocket.

'I must be going,' he smiled. 'I fear my friends will start to get worried if I'm late. Heaven knows what they'd get up to.'

Miranda stood up and kissed the Doctor on the cheek.

'Thank you for the drink,' she said. 'It's been lovely. It was really nice to meet you.'

'You too, Miranda,' said the Doctor.

'And don't worry about me. I can see you think I'm a little bit

mad.'

He sighed, accepting defeat. 'Not at all. I just don't like the sound of you not making decisions for yourself. You can't idly go along

with what you're told by someone you've never met.'

Miranda said, 'I'm a happier person than I've ever been before,

Doctor. Isn't that good?'

'Yes, yes it is,' he said, and he smiled, and Miranda knew he

wasn't lying to spare her feelings.

Her little piece of happiness came from something so small and

silly, but it was her little piece of happiness, and she knew the

Doctor wouldn't begrudge her. Miranda watched him leave and

walk back towards Canary Wharf station. She chastised herself for

not asking for his mobile number. Then again, like her, he probably wasn't the kind of person who liked text messaging.

Miranda finished her wine and went home.

Wednesday

'There is a good service on the Jubilee line,' chimed the automatic announcement.

Miranda Peel was only half listening. She walked down to the far

end of the platform, then looked up at the electronic timetable. The 37

next train was just a minute away. Assuming there were no delays,

she'd be at London Bridge in time for the 18.01.

When the train arrived, Miranda got on. As usual at this time of

the day, it was busy, but she spotted –

At the far end of the carriage, right next to the door that led to the driver's cab at the rear of the train, was the Doctor.

He was sitting with a broad grin on his face, and he waved for her to come and join him.

'Hello again,' she said, smiling as she sat down. 'We must stop

meeting like this.'

'Well,' said the Doctor conspiratorially, 'I must confess that I'm here on purpose. I guessed that you were the sort of person who

always got the same train and liked the same carriage.'

Miranda wasn't quite sure how to take this. Was he actually

trying to chat her up? He was very persistent, certainly.

'It's good to see you again,' she said.

On the journey, they chatted. But it was all small talk. The Doctor told her that he had decided to stay on in London for at least another day. His friends had gone off to the Science Museum, he explained.

'Zoe will think it's all very primitive, but never mind,' he added.

Miranda could sense that the Doctor was trying to keep the

conversation light. There was something on his mind, she could see, and he didn't know how to bring it up.

'Doctor,' she said as they pulled away from Southwark station.

'Shall we go to Canary Wharf? It's my turn to buy you a drink.'

The bar was just as full as the previous day. Miranda bought a

glass of red wine and a coffee. Joining the Doctor at the table,

Miranda decided to force the issue.

'Come on, Doctor,' she said. 'What's on your mind?'

He smiled at her – that sad face again, those deep meaningful

eyes looking back at her. He took a sip of his drink.

'I've had an interesting day, Miranda. Please don't be angry but,

after our talk yesterday, I was intrigued. I bought a copy of *24/7* in

Greenwich. Fascinating magazine, I must say. Then, today, I telephoned the magazine's office and asked for the contact details of Harry Scopes. He writes the horoscopes page, doesn't he?

'When I went to visit Mr Scopes, I learnt that his real name is Timothy Todd. He's a freelance writer who lives in Gunnersbury. Very nice man. He agreed to meet me, and allowed me to ask him all manner of questions. I think he thought I was researching a book or an article, I'm afraid, but what's one little white lie, eh? Well, I learnt something rather strange. Timothy does indeed write the horoscopes: he told me all about his system, which involves the planets' movements and the time of the year. It all sounded very

complicated and scientific, but I suspect it was meant to. He told me that after he writes them, he submits them to the magazine. Sends them to the editor via email.'

Miranda smiled at the way he said 'email', as if he wasn't particularly au fait with the concept.

'But the strange thing is,' he added, in a tone that had become slightly harder, 'that they're often changed before being published. Timothy even told me that he'd stopped reading the finished versions when they were published as they – the editors – make changes and rewrite them. He was pleased to say that he still gets paid.'

Miranda didn't know what to say or how to react. Why was the Doctor – this wonderful new friend she'd made – going to such lengths to discredit the horoscopes?

'I'm sorry, Doctor,' she said. 'I just don't see what you're doing.

Why are you telling me all this?'

'Tony Gibbs.'

'What about him? What about Tony?'

'Tony's your friend, isn't he?' said the Doctor. 'And your

neighbour. He works at *24/7*, the magazine that publishes the horoscopes. Do you know what he does there?'

'I...' Miranda was shaking, thoughts swirling around her head. 'I

think he's... Well, I'm not sure.'

'He's a copy editor. One of Tony's jobs is to edit the horoscopes.

He rewrites them, makes sure they fit on the page nicely, and are

spelt correctly. And he's been inserting messages into the

horoscopes specifically for you, Miranda. The reason you think

24/7's horoscopes are talking to you is because they are.'

Miranda couldn't speak. What had Tony been doing? Was he

stalking her? Was he dangerous?

'But he's my friend,' she said, confused. 'Tony is nice to me.

He's kind.'

'Oh, absolutely, my dear. And I'm certain he's doing all this with the very best of intentions. Like you said, you feel happier than you have in a year and your confidence is higher than ever. But I think you need to know that your neighbour might be rather smitten with

you and can't bring himself to tell you.'

Miranda's puzzlement tamed to anger.

'But is that happiness, Doctor?' asked Miranda. 'He's been

apparently guiding me, helping me make decisions, watching me.

Isn't that like spying on me? Like being controlled? Being told how to live your life? Being manipulated?'

The Doctor stood and said, ‘I think that’s for you to decide. But I very much doubt that he’s being malicious or playing a game with

you, or else your life would be quite different, wouldn’t it? I think the most likely thing is that he is incredibly shy. Anyway, you have all the facts to hand and I have to be going. It really was lovely to see you again. I hope our paths cross again.’

After shaking hands – she wasn’t sure if she should hug him – Miranda watched the strange man leave the bar and walk across towards the Tube station. For the first time in her life, Miranda knew that whatever she did next was down to her, not *24/7*, or Harry Scopes, and certainly not Tony.

Tony. She would definitely be having words with – she stopped herself. A year ago she wouldn’t have known what to do about something like this. She’d have panicked about it, ignored it and hoped it went away. But now she was confident enough to face any problem head-on. This is what Tony’s fake horoscopes had done. They’d helped her become a confident, self-assured woman. Did he deserve her thanks or a slap? Maybe both.

She gulped the last of the wine in one mouthful and strode out of the bar, laughing and ignoring anyone who looked at her oddly. She could feel her hands were trembling slightly and her heart was pounding harder in her chest. Suddenly everything seemed to be in sharper focus. Colours were more vibrant, the noises around her a little louder.

Now she knew what the Doctor meant. Her destiny was her responsibility.

My God, she thought, this feels *wonderful*.

40

Hiccup in Time

Matthew James

An adventure of Liz Shaw, with the Third Doctor

To find oneself transported back in time to the Year Of Our Lord 1539 would faze most people but not Dr Elizabeth Shaw, erstwhile member of the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce. Ensconced in the relative comfort of the country house of the Duke of Norfolk, Liz had food, shelter and safety, and, as the Duke was mostly away in London, little to do except wait for the Doctor to turn up. If he ever did.

She had only left him for a few moments to fetch them both a cup of tea from the UNIT canteen. He had been fiddling with that wretched TARDIS when – the moment she had stepped into his lab – she suddenly found herself over four centuries in the past and four feet in the air.

As ever, her first thought of the day was, Will today be the day?'

This was quickly followed by, 'What if the Doctor never arrives to rescue me?' She tried to keep such thoughts buried deep in her mind. No good would come from giving in to despair.

Set in its own grounds, the Duke's estate housed several outbuildings and farms of various sizes. These were worked by serfs, and it appeared to be entirely self-sufficient.

The Duke's farm, the yard of which ran directly under Liz's window, supplied the manor with milk, eggs, beef and mutton. It

looked picturesque. On a bright morning like today it could even look beautiful – but it smelt absolutely putrid. Barnyards with chickens clucking incessantly and noisy, rosy-cheeked children milking cows and minding cattle might sound like something to tempt Elgar into composing a pastoral symphony, but animal swill, dung, the rotting, salted food – supposedly still fit for purpose – and the monumental stink of outside latrines might have made him think again.

'This place needs sorting out,' she had told the steward once the Duke had taken her under his wing, 'for hygiene reasons if nothing else. And why is it so cold all the time? Couldn't we light one of these fires?' Huge, empty fireplaces stood ready in the main hall and dining area but no one seemed keen to light them. No doubt

their thick cloaks, double-layered tunics, excess fat and overdosing on ale helped to keep them warm. She blessed the fact she was wearing trousers, although they had raised eyebrows almost as much as her sudden appearance.

'Light a fire in summer?' the steward had laughed. 'We'll have no wood left for winter, my lady. You will want to get out of those light, Eastern silks and pantaloons and put some woollen sacking on.'

Liz ignored him. She had already told him about the fleas in the wool. Slowly, day by day and with a gentle insistence, life began to improve for those under the Duke's protection. Clothes were washed and disinfected under her supervision and a small burner 'for heating the Duke's medicine' was supplied for her bedroom. Liz also occupied herself establishing a clinic of sorts that

concentrated on prevention as well as cure. The locals were far from stupid, just uneducated, and most were becoming glad of the

benefits of such things as boiling drinking water before

consumption and washing their hands before handling food.

It had been very different when she'd arrived, especially when

quite a few people were all for burning her as a witch. But the Duke quickly realised what an asset 'Lady Shaw' could be, and saw how

her skills could be used to his advantage. For her part, Liz enjoyed educating him in science, basic though it was, as His Grace had a

good mind – when he applied it. On a good day they could talk for

hours and hours, and her teaching was slowly opening his mind,

although trying to make him see the Earth orbited the Sun had

caused a furious row and they didn't speak for a week.

Liz's normal day started at five every morning to the sound of the farm's cockerel greeting the sunrise. Taking a bleary-eyed aim

through the open window, she lobbed a piece of stale bread into the yard. The crowing stopped immediately as the bird began to eat.

She closed her eyes and smiled. Yes, she'd got this 16th-century

living sussed but, oh, she could kill for a cup of tea. And a good comb. Some foundation. Even a nub of lip–

'Burn the witch!'

The cry came from below her window and Liz sighed. Despite

the Duke's patronage, some locals really knew how to spoil her day.

She went to the window and stuck her head out cautiously. No

rotten veg came her way.

'How many times do I have to tell you?' she shouted at the

unkempt, grizzly man below. 'I am not a witch! There is no such

thing as witchcraft. Everything has a rational explanation if you

open your mind.'

The man whipped out a turnip from behind his back and threw it

at her. She ducked her head just in time. 'Peasant!'

Her bedroom door opened and the Duke's page burst in. A thin,

pale 14-year-old lad with badly cut hair, Percy could be the butt of jokes from the older servants as he often seemed to be in a world of his own. Since helping Liz, however, his status and confidence had grown.

'His Grace wants to see you now, Lady Shaw.' Was the boy

suppressing a grin?

Liz nodded. 'Another hangover? All right, Percy, I'm on my way.

You know the routine: fetch an egg from the kitchen and that bottle of special sauce.'

His Grace certainly seemed to be suffering as Liz entered the hall to see him with his head in his hands, but he had a greater problem

than a headache and dehydration.

Away from the world of politics, Norfolk was a pleasant, even

jovial man. His patronage of Liz and her strange ideas demonstrated an open mind and a tolerant nature lacking in the – her train of

thought derailed for a second – less intelligent of his

contemporaries. In appearance Norfolk was large and bluff, a

typical country gentleman, an image he often played on for the

amusement of the King or wrong-footing his opponents. Norfolk

had enemies at Henry VIII's court so his political life absorbed

most of his time. A wrong word to the King, or perhaps a document

forged by a rival, could end in his death at any time.

Clutching a screwed-up piece of paper, Norfolk started pacing the floor, obviously anxious about something. Liz was followed by Percy carrying a small tray with a bottle, a wooden beaker and a fresh egg. She gestured for the lad to put it on a table near the Duke.

'Good morning, Your Grace,' said Liz, curtseying. 'Feeling fragile? I've got just the thing. Percy, crack that egg into the beaker and add three drops of the Worcester sauce substitute.'

'No more of that cat spit!' the Duke shouted. 'You will poison me with your medicines!'

Liz was surprised by the Duke's vehemence but didn't show it. She'd witnessed blazing rows between the Brigadier and the Doctor, after all. 'I've cured your headaches before,' insisted Liz. She lowered her voice. 'And what about that rash?'

'It is your so-called skill with healing that is my, no, our problem.'

In the three months (that also felt like forever) since being unceremoniously transported here with only her handbag, two cups of tea and a plastic fork, Liz had become adept at dealing with the Duke's tantrums, but this confused her. 'How is it a problem?'

He fixed her with a steady stare. 'You say science can solve everything?'

'Explain everything,' corrected Liz. 'You remember how I explained to you about gravity when I first arrived –'

‘You fell from nowhere and landed on my squire.’

‘Yes, well that was gravity.’

‘Grave indeed. He almost died.’

That had been the plastic fork. ‘I made him well again, didn’t I?’

‘With magic fungus.’

‘A culture to help the reaction to the infection.’ The incident had been interesting, if rather dramatic. Her life might have been forfeit if the squire had died. The fork itself had been clean but, as it was from the future, bacteria that would have had no effect on a 20th-century person were the likely cause of the violent reaction in the unfortunate squire. She had even worried that she might even cause a new plague and change history forever. Still, when the squire’s

fever had worsened and he’d fallen into a coma, it meant he hadn’t screamed when she’d needed to re-set his broken leg.

‘But can you cure hiccups?’

Liz frowned. ‘You don’t have hiccups.’

‘It is his Royal Majesty who does, and he has had them for nigh

on three weeks!’

Liz showed her surprise. ‘Hiccups don’t usually last that long.

Could there be another underlying cause? Stomach trouble or

indigestion? Does he bolt his food? I doubt he eats enough fibre.’

‘This is your God-protected monarch you are talking about,

woman! You will show the proper respect!’ shouted the Duke

loudly. He kicked over the table with the beaker of raw egg, waving the letter at her. ‘And you will show it when he arrives here! Many have tried to cure the King and he has had messengers scour the

land for a remedy. And someone has told him about you!’ He

pointed at Liz. ‘And if you fail, I fail. And if I fail, Lady Shaw, you die.’

Liz went cold. It was all very well being the smartest person in the land, but a handful of university degrees wouldn't stop an axe.

'In two days,' the Duke continued, 'the King will be here. Everyone who knows of his unfortunate affliction is praying for his recovery. I suggest you do the same. If the hiccups have not stopped, we must be ready.'

Liz thought for a moment. What sort of things would these people have tried? Surprises, drinking a glass of water upside down, a spoonful of something like sugar on the tongue? Did they have refined sugar yet? History wasn't Liz's strongest subject. Surely she could do better than anyone in the country.

44

'A hiccup is simply the diaphragm pulling down spasmodically rather than smoothly,' she began, 'usually through eating too quickly or nervous tension. I suspect a diet and digestive palliative is all he needs. I seem to remember His Majesty is far too,' she paused, stumbling on the sentence, 'grand for his height, so some running on the spot might be a good start for regulating breath control.'

The Duke groaned at her language. 'If and when the King arrives,' he said quietly, 'I shall do the talking.'

The rest of the day and the next Liz set to work. Traditional cures must not have worked so she put her chemistry degrees to good use by cooking up a soothing alkaline for an upset stomach, a gentle sedative for a jumpy nature, and a stink bomb that went bang when it was set off.

‘If that doesn’t simultaneously shock and distract the King into spontaneous reflux correction, then I’m a box of chocolates.’

When no tea arrived, the Doctor phoned through to the canteen to be told Liz had left a note saying she’d gone back to Cambridge a day early. The Doctor hated goodbyes and understood that she probably wanted to slip away. Only later – much, much later – did he happen upon the note in the pocket of an old cape. What he read made him feel very guilty.

During the time Liz and he had worked together, the TARDIS hadn’t been operational and his attempts to repair it occasionally caused strange things to happen. Wherever Liz had gone, it wasn’t to Cambridge, he suddenly realised. Liz’s note, after all, had been written in his handwriting.

‘Someone’s been messing about with time, and that someone appears to be me!’

Percy laid out Lady Shaw’s equipment on the bench and ticked the items off the list as she had shown him. He understood the importance of procedure, order and method; he knew how to write his name and how to read simple instructions. Whenever he tried to thank her for teaching him she just smiled and told him the best thanks was to keep an open mind and not to fear the unknown.

‘There is an explanation for everything, even if we don’t know what it is yet.’

Liz looked approvingly at the array of bottles and instruments.

‘You make a good lab assistant, Percy.’

The lad just blushed. ‘His Majesty should be here within the hour. A messenger has arrived ahead to make sure we are prepared.’

‘The King still hiccups?’

Percy nodded.

Liz was determined to remain positive and optimistic. ‘Well,

that’s fine isn’t it? I explained about hiccups to you and what we plan to do. We’ll start with the straightforward methods but if they fail there’s the medicine you mixed for me.’

‘It smells irksome.’

Liz had to agree. ‘Let’s hope we don’t need it.’

The Duke and his senior staff stood in a semicircle in the hall, the huge doors pulled wide open and all eyes fixed on the long

driveway. Approaching slowly and with much pomp came a troop

of chestnut brown horses, each dressed in shining livery and

carrying nobles of the King’s entourage. A little to the rear came foot soldiers keeping watch on the food and equipment that was

borne stoically by ten donkeys.

Further back followed servants trudging dutifully and avoiding as

best they could the animal mess and mud from those before them.

Last and least were the hangers-on who joined the royal party as it entered town in the hope of a glimpse of the King. But he was

surrounded by a tight-knit group of guards, and no glimpse of the

Defender of the Faith was to be caught. Only the royal banner could be seen, fluttering in the light breeze.

As the party reached the courtyard a faint noise drifted from

within the circle of guards, becoming louder as a figure made his

way towards them through the throng. Norfolk pretended he

couldn’t hear it as he dare not acknowledge the King until he

physically appeared. His Majesty would certainly not appreciate his hiccups being treated as if they were a syncopated fanfare.

The group parted and the King stood glaring at Norfolk.

'Hic!'

The Duke bowed low. 'Your Majesty is most welcome.

Everything is prepared for your ease.'

The King's eyes narrowed and he mounted the steps carefully,

hiccupping every other one. The Lord Chancellor followed

unctuously and shot a triumphant look at Norfolk. He knew how

much damage failure would do to the reputation of his political

rival.

'Well?' demanded the King. 'Where is this "scientist" you brag

of?'

Things were not going well. Liz had spent the last few minutes

explaining what 'boo' meant and why she had said it so loudly.

'You should have explained first,' said the King, huffily. 'Now

we know your purpose, you shall try again.'

Liz groaned. 'But that would defeat the point, sire.' Was calling

the King 'sire' correct, she suddenly wondered? She hoped her lack of etiquette knowledge wouldn't lose her her head. 'It must be a

surprise. Let's try drinking a glass of water the wrong way round.'

Henry beckoned Norfolk towards him. 'Are you sure the woman

is sane?'

'Quite sure, sire. The things she does have rational, logical

motives. Her intellect is as fine as a man's.'

'Boo!' shrieked Liz, jumping up in front of them.

The King looked blank. 'I thought you were not going to try that again?'

'That's why I thought you wouldn't be expecting it. Has it worked?'

The King hiccupped then glowered. 'No.'

Liz was not to be put off 'Try drinking this juice, sire. But drink it from the wrong side of the glass.'

With an edge of impatience Henry demanded. 'What do you mean, how can one drink from the wrong side?'

Liz thrust the glass into Percy's hand. 'Show him,' she hissed.

Trembling in the presence of such dangerous royalty, Percy complied.

'Now the boy is all wet!' shouted the King. 'I am beginning to think, Norfolk, that we have had our time wasted. The woman is an obvious fraud!'

'Sire, if you please. Doctor Shaw – you have a potion, do you not?'

Liz could see the Duke growing worried and she didn't blame him. Her history might not be brilliant, but she did remember that Henry wasn't known as the most good-natured of men. Reluctantly, she fetched the bottle of homemade indigestion medicine from the table and poured a little into a small glass. The smell was beyond vile.

'Allow me to explain, sire. Your stomach works to break down the food you eat and extract the goodness from it. The waste is

passed into the small intestine. Sometimes in the process excess acid can be formed and –'

'And one gets indigestion,' interrupted the King. 'I am not a simpleton "Doctor Shaw" and fancy words do not confuse me. Are you saying my hiccups are the result of mere indigestion?'

'Probably,' said Liz nervously, adding a hasty 'sire'.

'What say you, Lord Chancellor?'

The Chancellor, a hearty man with a fine beard and a great coat that struggled to cover his ample stomach, saw his chance to stir things up. 'No doubt she has cured His Grace the Duke of indigestion, and perhaps more besides, but we all know that the

hiccup is the result of a simple imbalance of the humours. To treat one without the others will only put the balance further out. I think this female physic is another charlatan, perhaps even a witch who seeks to do harm to the Royal house.'

'If the Lord Chancellor knew as much about medicine as he does of the law, then everyone in England would live to be a hundred!' exclaimed Norfolk. '"This female physic" you so easily dismiss has done more than cure indigestion. My squire was knocked from his horse and lay dying, his neck twisted and his leg broken beneath him. She restored him to life and dulled the pain. She set the leg better than any physician I have been unfortunate enough to meet, and braced the neck in an apparatus more subtle than the designs of a French torturer.'

Liz smiled, remembering the smelling salts from her handbag, and the last of the aspirin. She gestured towards the Chancellor.

‘This gentleman describes a holistic approach to medicine and there is much to recommend it. Please let me try treating the indigestion first or, in curing one thing Your Majesty may develop another.’

During her speech the King began hiccupping more rapidly and increasingly painfully. He was ready to try anything – almost. He could smell the mixture and did not fancy it. ‘Norfolk – hic –you take some – hic – first. Tell us how it tastes.’

Reluctantly the Duke tried some. After a pause he tried some more. Then some more. ‘This is most excellent, sire!’

Liz gave the Chancellor a small yet triumphant smile. Henry reached out for the bottle and was about to drink eagerly when Norfolk gave a loud hiccup.

‘So much for that,’ murmured the Chancellor.

Before anyone knew what was happening, Henry had snatched a sword from one of his bodyguards and swung it towards Norfolk.

‘Boo!’ he yelled at the top of his voice.

Norfolk’s next hiccup died in his throat.

‘See,’ cried Liz delightedly. ‘Shocks work.’

‘But not for me,’ said the King.

‘You cannot expect His Majesty to have ordinary hiccups,’ said the Chancellor.

‘Try holding your breath and counting to fifty,’ Liz said desperately.

‘I have tried this before.’

‘Oh.’

He sighed, then hiccupped. ‘I shall try again.’ The seconds passed with the King holding his breath, his face turning crimson. After

thirty seconds he had to stop as a hiccup shook his formidable

frame. ‘Can no one cure me of these meddlesome hiccups?’ he

demanded.

Liz racked her brains. If only he would try the medicine – but she would never persuade him now. The Duke turned and pointed at Liz

dramatically. ‘You have played me false. You said your science

could do anything, but you have failed. That was your last chance.’

‘No,’ the King declared, ‘you have one more chance! Hic! I have

found imminent death brings out the best in people. Think on it –

hic! One last chance. Fail and you die!’

‘His Majesty has had enough of cures that do not work,’ added

the Chancellor, unhelpfully. ‘Many have professed special skills

and uttered magical words that have offered no respite. Perhaps

Norfolk sang her praises too highly.’

Norfolk rounded on him. ‘I never promised a cure! It wasn’t even

me who mentioned Lady Shaw at court.’

The King beat the sides of his chair with his fists. ‘Enough! Will these hiccups never stop? If no one finds a cure today, heads will roll!’

Now Liz dared to let her anger show. ‘I never said science can do

everything. I said it can explain anything. It can explain hiccups but this obviously isn’t a straightforward case.’

It was three months down the line, she was lucky to have

survived this long, she decided. If they were going to kill her she might as well tell them a few home truths. ‘There are no easy

solutions. A little effort is needed from the patient. Balanced meals, less food, more exercise –which doesn't mean galloping on a horse after a pheasant. It means getting out and taking long walks. The key to good digestion is moderation. Hiccups on this scale stem from long-term abuse.'

The King was desperate to pronounce a death sentence but could not do so for hiccupping. Everyone rushed round blaming each other and Liz wondered if she could get to the door. But she spotted Percy cowering in the corner and knew she could not leave him. The King would probably take his anger out on the poor lad if they couldn't get to her.

'You're behaving like children,' she said boldly. 'Take long, slow breaths. What you need is to lie quietly for an hour without any excitement or you'll have a seizure.'

A voice came from behind them. 'What His Majesty needs is a doctor.'

Liz span around. 'Doctor!'

Inside the TARDIS, above UNIT headquarters at the time of Liz's supposed departure, the Doctor had been able to monitor the freak temporal effect. He followed it.

Materialising in a wood, he quickly set about finding his friend. He was unsure, however, how much time had passed since Liz's arrival. The TARDIS refused to be quite so accurate over such things as days, weeks or months, but the old girl wouldn't be far off. He hoped. What if he was about to discover she had died in 16th-

century England? It would be his fault and nothing he could do

would change that. Nothing.

Laughter up ahead drew him on. It sounded good-natured. He

went over to say hello, check the date and enquire casually whether any strangers had been seen recently. The source of the merriment

was a group of soldiers taking advantage of the sunshine and a jug of cider. The sight of the Doctor gave rise to more laughter.

'A minstrel!' cried one at the sight of his plush velvet jacket and cape. Their captain was not so friendly. 'Stop there! No one enters the Duke's residence today!'

'There's no need to be aggressive, old chap.'

'Is there not? I shall decide that.' The captain raised the flat of his sword and, as he swung it, the Doctor had to fall to one side and his attacker found himself propelled by his own momentum straight

into a tree. The Doctor brushed the dust from his jacket and checked his reflection in the soldier's helmet. But the captain was up on his feet straight away, and the Doctor was surrounded by the soldiers, their previous high spirits having vanished.

'You are under arrest for trespass. The King has had enough of

charlatans.'

Several swords pointed at the Doctor's throat.

'I'm very pleased to hear it. I've no time for them myself. Now if you would move aside I'll be on my way.'

'I suppose you have heard about the reward?'

The Doctor wished the men would just let him get on. 'Reward

for what?'

The soldier sneered. 'Of course you have. Well, you are too late,

strange fellow. The King is seeing a scientist,' he said, pronouncing the new word proudly.

Liz. She was safe. The Doctor's spirits were lifted.

'And where is this scientist?'

At Norfolk's estate.'

'Then you must take me there at once, my good man. Lives

depend upon it!'

The Doctor stepped through the doors and grinned at the furious

arguments. Liz was as delighted to see him as he was her. He put a hand on her shoulder. 'My dear, Liz, I can't tell you how good it is to see you again. I see you've made some friends.'

50

'You could say that. What kept you? Your hair's grown, hasn't

it?'

The Doctor was evasive. 'I'll explain later. You'll be back home

soon. The TARDIS is in the woods.'

'You got it working?'

'Yes and no.'

'Anyway, Doctor, I think we ought to go before King Henry

recovers his speech and they start noticing us.' Liz turned to Percy.

'Remember all the things I taught you, Percy. Never be afraid to

question accepted truths.'

The Doctor nodded approvingly and they began to walk from the

hall. 'I hope you haven't left anything anachronistic anywhere.'

'Stop them!' Norfolk shouted at the retreating figures. 'His

Majesty has not finished with you!'

'Nice try, Doctor,' Liz whispered.

The Doctor shrugged. ‘I get on with most of England’s monarchy.’ He regarded the King curiously. It was hard to imagine this was once the body of an athletic man. Henry looked squat and bellicose and in need of soap. Tact was called for. He gave a courtly bow. ‘Good day, Your Majesty. Allow me to introduce myself. I am the Doctor.’

‘Another one.’

‘Are you a scientist?’ Norfolk asked.

‘I am happy to be called so.’

‘Then why does your science not help me?’ demanded the King.

‘If I may consult with Doctor Shaw?’

The King stood up. ‘You have one hour – hic. It will take that long to build a pyre. Norfolk, see to it. When we next meet, doctors, if I am not cured then you shall both burn for witchcraft!’

Liz’s logical mind wanted to point out that failure suggested they were not witches whereas success suggested they were. To burn them for failure surely got things the wrong way round.

But she didn’t.

The Doctor considered the facts. ‘A good shock ought to do the trick. So why hasn’t it?’

‘Nothing seems to surprise him, that’s why.’

‘Good point. We must remember that a king is trained not to react to shocks. He must be calm and collected at the unexpected or his subjects may doubt him. It’s all part of his training.’

‘So the surprise must be a big one. One even Henry can’t expect.’

Liz wandered to the window and looked out. ‘That pyre’s

impressive.’

‘A ridiculous over-reaction,’

‘The King won’t back down. He can’t, any more than he can be seen to be surprised.’

The Doctor scratched the side of his nose thoughtfully. Then an idea struck him. ‘Of course – the TARDIS!’

‘We have to get there first, Doctor.’

‘We don’t. We get them to take us there. Don’t you see? The TARDIS is the surprise. Once Henry sees inside, it will be as much as he can do to speak let alone hiccup. And before he can think how useful it would be to him, we make our excuses and leave.’

Liz thought this over. The past few hours made her wonder if anything would stop Henry hiccupping. But they would be right next to the TARDIS for a quick getaway. It had to be better than the situation they were in now. ‘Let’s try it.’

Spots of rain fell through the sunshine onto the plumage of the horses and sparkled in droplets down the shiny helmets of the King’s men. Mud spattered upwards over the boots of the soldiers and settled in dirty water soaking into the weave of their leggings. The white horse lent to Liz from the Duchess’s stable walked daintily around puddles, like a ballerina finding herself forced to perform on a rugby field. The King sat in a covered carriage keeping dry, and Liz spent the twenty-minute journey praying his hiccups would continue. If they stopped before they reached the TARDIS he would have no further need to make the journey, and

they might not be able to get away. But there seemed little danger of him stopping. In fact, they were getting worse.

‘Obviously anxiety-related,’ the Doctor whispered. ‘Must be

going through a stressful time. What year is it, did you find out?’

‘Of course I did,’ Liz hissed back. ‘I’ve not been idling my time

away in the last three months.’

Three months, thought the Doctor guiltily. The TARDIS really

could’ve done better than that.

‘And thanks to me they have decent plumbing.’

‘Really?’

‘Well, better than they had. And they understand about storing

food. And the water is –’

The Doctor raised his hand dramatically. ‘Stop!’

Everyone stopped. The rain had eased and the King, deciding it

safe to abandon the shelter of his carriage, gestured for help to get down and made his way towards the Doctor. He looked around.

‘There’s nothing here.’

‘Allow me to contradict you, sire.’

‘I do not.’

‘There is a blue box at the edge of the wood. The cure for your

hiccups is inside.’

The Doctor began striding towards the TARDIS which could be

made out behind some bushes. The guards stopped him.

Henry considered. ‘I shall talk to the woman. Lady, do you agree

with this itinerant that we shall find healing in his blue cabinet?'

Liz nodded emphatically. 'I do, sire. All you need to do is look inside. One glance, and the hiccups will be cured.'

'Norfolk? What say you?'

Norfolk knew what was coming. He glared at Liz. 'I shall investigate.'

Liz smiled encouragingly. 'Remember your headaches,' she whispered. 'I've never let you down.'

Taking heart, the Duke allowed the Doctor to escort him to the box and open the door. Liz thought him rather brave when he squared his shoulders and stepped inside. He didn't know it was much more than a big blue shed.

'And now out again,' said the Doctor quickly, and grabbed the Duke's elbow to propel him back outside.

The Duke struggled for words. 'Unbelievable, sire! It is truly incredible!'

The King lumbered towards the TARDIS as quickly as he could. Excitement made his hiccups increase and the Doctor greeted him hurriedly. 'Your Majesty, step inside and look about you!'

The door opened and Henry stepped inside, blundered about for a moment and then reappeared in the doorway. He stared around at the assembled crowd and gave an enormous hiccup.

The Doctor grabbed Liz's arm. 'Time for us to leave, I think.'

'A reflected light to dazzle and confuse, that is all. What

conspiracy is this, Norfolk? What trickery do you seek to play upon your sovereign?'

'Majesty, I – I– I do not understand. I saw with my own eyes!'

The King's captain stepped forward eagerly and raised his sword.

'Hic! Wait! Your eyes, you say, Norfolk?' The King lowered his

voice. 'Lord Chancellor, did we bring – hic! – our spectacles?'

'Glasses?' whispered Liz. 'In 1539?'

The date intrigued the Doctor. 'Rudimentary glasses existed but it seems the King is too vain to wear them. 1539! That explains it!'

Before Liz could question him further, the King reappeared at the

TARDIS door, this time with a crude wooden frame containing

thick ground glass wedged on to the end of his nose. 'I thought the sun reflected into the box, but it is lit from within,' he said in surprise.

The Doctor and Liz exchanged glances. The Doctor pushed the

door wider.

'Take another look, sire.'

Once again the King peered inside and once again he emerged

dissatisfied. 'A clever trick, but it will take more than dancing

sunbeams to impress me. You are a fool, Norfolk. Guards, take

these "scientists" away. They shall burn for our pleasure later. Hic!

I am cursed – the Pope is a knave and he seeks to rob me of – hic! –

speech!'

Liz pulled at the Doctor's sleeve. 'Henry should be able to

differentiate between light and colour but he can't. He sees

everything as blurred light, even with the glasses.'

The Doctor rubbed his chin thoughtfully. ‘He squints a lot, too.’

‘He’s practically blind! No wonder he doesn’t react to shocks.’

Norfolk half-heard what the two were saying and pulled Liz to one side desperately. ‘Do not try any further treatment. It is bad enough I am disgraced, but if you annoy His Majesty still further I may find myself in the Tower!’

‘How selfish,’ Liz snapped back. ‘We’ll burn if we don’t stop the King’s hiccups.’

‘You asked for it,’ retorted Norfolk. ‘So full of yourself, but where has it got you?’

‘That’s rich. You were glad enough for my help when you got that rash. And it’s coming back!’

Norfolk’s face reddened.

The Doctor allowed himself to be grabbed by one of the soldiers then, before the man knew what was happening, he dropped to the floor, spun back and hurled the soldier over his shoulder.

‘Hic! What happened?’

‘He is trying to escape, sire!’

The Doctor strode towards the King. ‘No, sire. I can cure you. I promise it. You were right and we were all wrong.’

Henry raised his hand to stop the guards. ‘He begins to talk sense. We shall hear him out.’

‘Your Majesty said you were cursed, and so you are.’

‘So now you resort to mysticism!’ said Norfolk.

‘No,’ Liz replied vehemently. ‘This remains a medical problem

and the Doctor will treat it.'

'If I may borrow Your Majesty's spectacles,' said the Doctor.

The King passed them to him. The Doctor reversed them and held them near the King's face. Through the glass he could see a magnified image of the King's eyes. 'As I thought: cataracts. Bad ones, too.'

The King struggled to understand. 'A waterfall in the eye? This is mad talk.'

Reaching into his pocket the Doctor took out his sonic

screwdriver. 'The cataract I refer to is like a film of murky water and covers the eye making it difficult to see clearly. The spectacles make little difference.'

'I knew it!' exclaimed Henry. 'T told them I did not need the impedimenture.'

'If you will allow me, I can remove the problem with this device, completely painlessly and quickly.'

Norfolk looked frightened, especially when the Chancellor asked the obvious question: 'How will this stop the King hiccupping?'

The Doctor ignored him. 'Your Majesty?'

The King shifted the weight from his bad leg and hiccupped again. He strained to see the Doctor clearly. With all his discomfort he would do almost anything to relieve an affliction, and if the hiccups remained but he could see clearly again, it was worth the risk. 'Very well, try. But if you fail, you die. And if you cause me injury, you will be flayed alive and then you will die. Understand?'

'Perfectly, sire. But might I ask a favour in return?'

There were gasps at such impertinence, but the King let the Doctor continue.

'If we succeed, do we have your word that we may leave to go where we will?'

The Doctor knew that Henry might well decide he and Liz were too valuable to be permitted to work for anyone else. But the royal word was not to be broken. At least, he hoped not.

'You have my word,' the King agreed.

Watched closely by Norfolk and the Chancellor, and with some trepidation from Liz, the Doctor set the sonic screwdriver and carefully aimed it at the royal left eye. The King let out a gasp but quickly regained composure as the sensation settled to a mild tingle.

'You are an excellent patient, Your Majesty,' said the Doctor quickly. 'Nearly done.' He moved back. 'Liz, hold the left eyelid down while I do the right eye.'

Liz complied while the King stood completely still. She hoped for all their sakes this was going to work.

'There. Thank you, Liz. If you would close both eyes for a moment, Your Majesty.'

The King did so but, at the same time, let out a spate of hiccups.

The Chancellor rounded on them immediately. 'Enough of this charade, take them back to the castle where they can be dealt with at the royal pleasure. They are trying to distract us so they can escape.'

'Leave them!' King Henry had opened his eyes. He was blinking in the light. He was stepping forward with a look of wonder on his face. He was laughing. King Henry VIII was laughing and

hiccupping all at the same time. ‘I can – hic! – see!’ He turned to 55

Norfolk. ‘By the lights! That’s a terrible rash you have there.’

With a triumphant flourish the Doctor held wide the TARDIS

door, and for a third time, King Henry peered inside.

A little later, the Doctor and Liz stood before the King to say their farewells. His hiccups silenced at last and his eyesight better than it had been for years, Henry was in a generous mood. ‘I have need of

such cleverness at court. Return with us to Hampton – you shall be well rewarded.’

For a moment Liz let herself imagine what life would be like

living at Hampton Court, a whole palace full of people to educate

and instruct. Although history was not her strong point she recalled reading that Henry took an interest in the ‘new learning’. Might he let her design a system of solar heating? The one drawback of 16th-century living was how cold it got.

His next words brought her to her senses.

‘The woman may come too if you like, Doctor.’

‘Well, really!’ Liz said.

‘Thank you, sire,’ said the Doctor hurriedly. ‘Our life is,

however, dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and it is a long

road. And Your Majesty did give his promise.’

The King gave a low, disagreeable growl but nodded. ‘Yes, yes.

You may go if you wish.’

Liz saw an opportunity to get the miserable chauvinist to do

something worthwhile and held the Doctor back. ‘Sire, if you want

to reward us, in the Duke’s household is a page called Percy. He is a bright lad and he could be a good scientist one day. Give him a

chance to succeed. Don’t let him be bullied or belittled.’

The King revised his opinion of this woman doctor. She had a spark about her. ‘You shall have your wish. I will take the boy into my court and allow him his opportunity.’

Liz bowed. ‘Thank you, Your Majesty.’

‘A pretty face,’ the King whispered to the Chancellor. ‘She reminds us of our next wife, sweet Anne. Did you bring the miniature? I would look upon her likeness with my clear vision.’

‘It is at the manor, sire.’

As they talked the Doctor and Liz slipped into the TARDIS. The dematerialisation sound ripped through the wood and everyone stared in disbelief as slowly the box faded into nothingness. Silence.

‘Hic!’

The King turned in his saddle and stared at the culprit.

‘Chancellor?’

‘Sire – hic! I – hic! Oh dear. Hic!’

The King was delighted.

‘A shock cured me, and this shock hath afflicted you. Come, my friend, we shall return to Norfolk’s castle. There are many remedies there. You shall try the cordial, and maybe the vessel from which one drinks about-face.’

Hiccupping forlornly, the Chancellor followed the party back to the castle.

‘So, you got the TARDIS working,’ said Liz.

‘As I said, yes and no.’

‘Which means?’

The Doctor didn’t want to explain in detail that he had not

realised for a long time that Liz had fallen into the past. Not because it was his fault, but because the more she knew the more the

delicate balance of the timelines could be affected.

‘Suffice it to say it took a while to get the TARDIS working and

to follow the trail to find you. I am going to return you to the point in time you left so no one misses you.’

Liz thought about this. ‘You mean no one missed me?’

‘Exactly,’ the Doctor said. ‘And that’s because I am returning

you to the point you left. You see?’

‘Not entirely.’

The Doctor fished in his pocket for the note. ‘You must give this

note to the canteen manageress. She will see I get it and that’s why I don’t worry about you. Don’t stay and drink the tea. Call a taxi and go back to Cambridge a day early.’

Liz saw now. ‘Doctor, you forgot all about me! This is some half-

baked plan to cover things up!’

The Doctor had the decency to look embarrassed. ‘Yes and no.’

‘Don’t keep saying that.’

‘I genuinely got this note telling me you were safe in Cambridge.

I couldn’t have come to find you until the Time Lords restored the TARDIS, so my older self – me now – made sure when I did rescue

you I would leave my younger self – the “me” when you left – a

note that would tip me off, so to speak.’

Liz sighed. What was the point of arguing? ‘Life with you is

never dull, Doctor. There’s nothing quite like it.’

Very deliberately, Henry placed the miniature portrait of the Lady Anne of Cleves face down on the table and sighed long and deep.

Beside him stood the Chancellor. ‘Your Majesty is a lucky man,’ he managed to say between his hiccups.

‘Is the pyre completed?’ asked the King.

‘Yes, sire,’ said Norfolk. ‘Shall I have it dismantled?’

‘No,’ said the King in a dreadful whisper. ‘You shall have the

Chancellor taken out and tied to it.’ His voice got louder. ‘You shall bring me a flaming torch and I shall thrust it into the pyre and watch him burn as a traitor!’

The King swept the picture up and flung it at the Chancellor.

‘See? She is as ugly as my privy! Did you think I would not notice when I saw her close? Do you think I have the tastes of a farmer’s horse for its mare?’

‘Sire, I – I – thought you must like –1 mean, most of your wives

– hic!’

‘You thought wrong! Take him out!’

Minutes later, from within the pyre, the Chancellor called out

delightedly, ‘It has worked! Your Majesty, the shock has worked,

my hiccups have gone!’ There was a long pause. ‘There is no need

to burn me now,’ he added feebly.

Norfolk raised his arm, ready to signal the lighting of the fire. But the King beckoned him to come close instead. ‘Norfolk, no one

must know how I was deceived. The painting shall be redone to

make Anne of Cleves look more appealing. Then I can learn the

truth innocently when I see her in person for the first time.’

Norfolk bowed. ‘Do you really want to execute the Chancellor, or

throw him into my dungeons?'

The King turned to the boy at his side. 'Master Percy, what say

you?'

'I should have him live, sire,' said the nervous boy. 'He is only

ignorant.'

Henry chuckled. 'If ignorance were a crime I'd have no courtiers

left. He can live, Norfolk. But acquaint him with your dungeons.'

Liz watched the TARDIS dematerialise, feeling marvellous and

more than a little sad at the same time. The ship really was a time and space machine from another world, from a science she could

only dream of understanding. She wanted to stay, but knew she

could only have a single trip back to her proper place in space and time. The Doctor was almost falling over himself he felt so guilty, even though he hadn't actually apologised.

It would be fun to go back to her Doctor, the Doctor waiting for

his cup of tea, and tell him what his meddling had done. But that

would make things awkward at the least or, at the very worst, make the universe implode or something. And three months in the 16th-century wasn't anything to be sneezed at, she thought.

She went across to the canteen and found the manageress. 'I'm

Liz Shaw, the Doctor's colleague. He's going to phone through in a minute. Would you tell him I've gone back to Cambridge a day

early? This note explains everything. Perhaps you could make sure

he gets it.'

The phone rang.

'That'll be him now,' said Liz.

‘Can’t you answer it yourself? I’ve seventeen hungry soldiers to

cook for,’ the woman protested.

Liz smiled and shook her head. ‘Oh, no. I’m afraid I couldn’t

possibly do that. You see, I’m not here.’

59

What Has Happened to the

Magic of ‘Doctor Who’?

III

Gareth Roberts

Mr Barry Letts,

BBC Producer, ‘Doctor Who’

22nd March 1971.

Dear Mr Letts,

My friends and me reckon that ‘Doctor Who’ has really gone off the boil since the Doctor was exiled to Earth. I’m writing to tell you that we shan’t be watching any longer, as the magic of the

programme has disappeared. First of all, the whole point of ‘Doctor Who’ was that we didn’t know WHO the Doctor was. Then we

found out he was a Time Lord from the planet of the Time Lords,

and that he chose to travel in space because he was ‘bored’ on his own planet. This was a big mistake, ruining the essential mystery of the character. Why is the programme still called ‘Doctor Who’? It

should be called ‘Doctor Time Lord From The Boring Planet’. And

boredom – what a terrible reason for him taking up his travels in the first place. The Doctor is a hero and always has been! The new

Doctor was then sent to Earth, and that’s when the series’ problems really began. The whole point of the series was that the *Tardis* would transport the Doctor from place to place. Now he is stuck

with UNIT and the Brigadier, fighting off similar alien invasions in every story. The stories tend to take place in the same kind of locale

– radio telescopes, space launch headquarters, mining projects etc –

and now we have yet ANOTHER story, 'Claws of Axos', with

monsters attacking a nuclear reactor. And the new monsters are not a patch on old ones such as the Cybermen. Also, why is the Doctor

so serious now? The previous two Doctors always had a twinkle in

their eye, but this Doctor is very pompous and high-handed. He is

often rude to friends like the Brigadier and Jo Grant. The old

Doctors used their wits to baffle their opponents, but the new

Doctor uses karate and kung fu. This is another fundamental

misunderstanding of the character. I shall not be watching 'Doctor Who' again. Without the *Tardis* and the mystery of his origins, the programme is just not the same and I have given up!

Trevor Thorpe (aged 15), Anglesey

What Has Happened to the Magic of 'Doctor Who'? continues on page 92

Shamans

Steve Lyons

An adventure of Leela, with the Fourth Doctor

There were no such things as spirits. The Doctor had always been

quite clear about this.

'Superstitious rubbish!' he had grumbled in that derisive tone of his.

'Pomposity, that's all it is,' he had expounded on a more recent

occasion. 'To assume that, just because you don't understand

something, it must be inexplicable, supernatural. Where would that sort of attitude have got Descartes, hmm? Or Louis Pasteur? Or... or Omega? Or Scooby-Doo?'

And Leda knew she ought to believe him, ought just to accept

that everything she had been taught in her childhood was a lie –

because the Doctor was far cleverer than she was, far cleverer than the shaman of her tribe, Neeva, had ever been, and he was always,

always right about such things.

The Doctor was her shaman now. He was a shaman who didn't

believe in shamans.

But the doubt remained. What if he was wrong this time?

New York was the noisiest, most crowded place Leela had ever

seen, and the Doctor had dragged her straight to the heart of those crowds. Broadway was an insane crush of shops and theatres and

towering hotels, and moving metal monsters that the Doctor called

cranes with men underneath labouring to convert old buildings into new ones. It had made Leela feel anxious, nervous. Normally, she

was alert to every detail of her surroundings, but that was

impossible here. Whichever way she turned, there were always

scores of potential predators behind her, and she wouldn't even hear them coming.

She and the Doctor could barely hear each other's voices over the

constant din – and to cross from one side of this great road to the other had entailed the boarding of a perilous stream of horse-drawn carriages, carts and omnibuses.

The year was 1850, in the calendar of Leela's forefathers,

thousands upon thousands of years before she was even born. It was a

place of nightmares.

The Doctor, of course, had loved it.

'Look at this place!' he had enthused, clutching his hat to his brown curls and beaming. 'All this energy, all this hope. I think it's marvellous! Don't you think it's marvellous, Leela? And the people! Oh, the people who will pass along here in the next few years. The performers, the writers, the poets – me.'

He had come to a sudden halt then, and frowned.

'Hmm. Yes. Now that I come to think of it, that could be a problem. Leela, if you should happen to spot me in the street, you're to keep away from me – I mean, him – do you hear me?' He thought again, and added, 'Unless, of course, I don't look like me. In which case, you're to keep well clear anyway. Just don't talk to anybody, in fact.'

'Yes, Doctor,' Leela had said dutifully.

They had been in the city for four days. The Doctor had found them lodgings at a hotel called Barnum's, on Broadway itself, bartering with a handful of dull metal discs and crumpled pieces of paper. Since then, he had gone out every evening, seeking the company of pasty-faced men in downtown bars, discussing art and philosophy and literature with these men into the small hours. They had used fine words but Leela doubted if a single one had ever seen battle or fought for his life. That was how she measured a man.

She had soon grown tired of sitting at the Doctor's side and of nodding at whatever people said, of being ignored by his friends or, worse, treated as a curiosity, the savage in a lady's clothing. She was weary of answering so many questions about herself only to be disbelieved. That was why, tonight, she had told the Doctor that she

wished to be left behind, at Barnum's.

That was how she had come to be here.

The hotel suite was similar in layout to Leela and the Doctor's own: two bedrooms opening into a richly appointed private parlour. But

the soft armchairs had been removed from the parlour, and a pair of card tables pushed together at its centre.

Two sisters sat at opposite ends, facing each other. Their hands

rested flat on the tabletops, in plain sight. Between them, around the tables, twelve people sat with their hands also visible in the

candlelight.

How, then, was Leela – one of those twelve, seated in front of the fireplace close to the seam where the square tables met– meant to

explain the knocking?

It seemed to come from everywhere at once: from inside the

walls, above the ceiling, beneath her feet. As if there were

something outside of this room, encircling it, hammering to be let in.

Leela saw her companions' eyes darting from side to side, up and down, wide with fascination and a hint of fear as they sought the source of the unnerving sounds. She searched in the same way, with her gaze alone, holding herself rigid, keeping her hands on the tabletop as they had all been instructed to do.

Then the table moved.

It was only a tremble. Leela thought that somebody close to her might have kicked a leg. But the next movement was markedly more pronounced, and this time she was certain that the table had left the floor.

Both tables were moving. They were bucking increasingly violently, clashing as they danced – and Mr Greeley, seated across from Leela, gave a little gasp as he was pushed back in his seat.

Leela scraped her own chair backwards as her table made a quarter-turn beneath her palms. Then everyone was leaping to their feet, retreating to the walls of the room, and somebody screamed.

The tables fell still with a final dull thud.

Three sharp knocks sounded behind Leela. She spun around, half-dropping into a fighting stance, but saw only the empty fireplace.

She had reached for her knife instinctively, half-drawing it from the folds of the impractical skirts that the Doctor had insisted she wear. She looked around, self-consciously, to see if anybody had witnessed her indiscretion.

Somebody had.

The younger of the two sisters – Kate, twelve years of age, her black hair in pigtails but her face already old, cold, hard – fixed her with a curious stare.

'Neeva is worried about you,' said the girl in a stage whisper.

Leela's breath caught in her throat. 'What did you say?'

But now the other sister, Maggie, two years Kate's senior, gave a shudder that drew all eyes towards her. 'I can feel them!' she wailed. 'They are strong in this room tonight!' Her pronouncement sent a frisson of excitement through her audience.

And Margaret Fox smiled. 'I think it is time,' she said, 'that we put out the lights.'

It was from Mr Greeley that Leela had first heard of the Fox sisters. Mr Greeley was a forty-year-old man, a little overweight, his hairline receding – a gentleman, evidently, because when he had first stepped into the hotel's drawing room he had been wearing a top hat. He looked as if he had never hunted for a meal, as did many

in this strange place.

The Doctor had revealed that Mr Greeley was also a politician and a newspaper editor – one of some repute, to judge by the speed with which he had cornered the astonished man and pumped his hand.

And Mr Greeley had been told a story, which he had related to Leela and the Doctor. He had told them of a tiny cottage in a nearby hamlet and of an unquiet spirit, which had disturbed a family by knocking on their walls and moving their furniture at night. That

was until the youngest member of that family had plucked up the courage to address their tormentor.

With a child's impertinence, Kate Pox had demanded that 'Mr Splitfoot' – for such was the name that she and her sister had given the spirit– do as she said, that he repeat the rhythm she clapped out with her hands.

And the spirit had heard her, and obeyed.

'But,' Leela had interrupted at this point, unable to hold her tongue, 'the Doctor says there are no such things as –'

The Doctor had silenced her with a nudge, drowning out her voice with a booming laugh and a rude comment about her upbringing. Leela had shot him a resentful glare. He would never have allowed her to talk about the spirits this way. Why, then, did he not correct his newfound friend when he spoke of them?

As the afternoon had progressed, however, Leela had learned a little more about Mr Greeley. He was a downcast man, mourning the recent death of a beloved son. He needed to believe in something.

'Kate and her sister, Margaret, asked many questions of their spirit,' Mr Greeley had continued, 'and by means of a code of knocks he was able to answer them. He identified himself as a peddler, murdered in that very cottage and buried in its cellar. And the most remarkable thing is that, when Site Fox and his neighbours excavated that cellar, they found –'

'Fragments of bone,' the Doctor had said, sounding bored. 'Yes?'

'You've heard this tale told before?'

'One very much like it.'

‘And these sisters, they are here?’ Leela had asked. ‘At Barnum’s?’

The Doctor had confirmed this. ‘Offering the great and the good the chance to – what was the word you used, Mr Greeley? – ah yes, “investigate” this hotline of theirs to the spirit world. Very magnanimous of them, I’m sure.’

Mr Greeley had leaned forward in his armchair, his face aglow. ‘Of course, many men insist that these girls are hoaxers, that they 65 produce the knocks somehow themselves – but so far they have passed every test to which they have been put. Kate and Margaret Fox have raised the spirits even while their hands and their feet have been tied. That is why I had to come here, why I have to be present at one of their sittings. I must observe this phenomenon for myself.’

Later, Leela had been surprised to find the Doctor leaving for the evening as usual. ‘But what about the sisters?’ she had asked. ‘And their spirits?’ What if the Doctor *was* wrong?

She really ought to have known better by now.

The thick, long drapes in the parlour were closed. They blotted out all but a narrow, square seam of gaslight from the quieting street a good distance below them. Leela’s eyes were quick to adjust to the gloom. If the sisters hoped to conceal some trickery therein, they would be disappointed.

They were holding hands, the two girls and their twelve investigators, each taking the wrist of the person to his or her right. And Margaret Fox was speaking in a breathy voice, commanding any spirits present to make themselves known.

It wasn’t long before they did.

Leela tensed as the first knocks sounded. She thought they were coming from a bedroom door but she noticed that Mr Greeley was looking up at the ceiling, and another man at the fireplace. She felt the hand of the over-powdered lady to her left tightening about her wrist. This time, however, they could all draw strength from their contact with each other. Everybody held their ground – even when the lady at Leela's side shrieked and said that a cold hand had touched her shoulder.

'The spirits are among us,' said Maggie Fox quietly, 'and are willing to answer any questions we might have.'

Mr Greeley was the first to take up the invitation. Leda thought he might have asked about his son; instead, he confined himself to talk of the figure, and of stocks and bonds, things she did not really understand. His answers came, three knocks for 'yes', two knocks for 'no', one knock foe 'unclear', and they seemed to satisfy him.

Emboldened by this, others followed his lead. They tested the spirits by asking them to tap out their ages or the answers to simple sums. Then they asked for advice on affairs of the heart. One young lady giggled as, using an alphabetical code interpreted by Maggie, the spirits named the man she would marry.

How quickly, thought Leela, they had conquered their fears.

'This is not right,' she spoke up. 'When my own tribe sought the

advice of Xoanon, it was on important matters such as the prospects for the next harvest, or the likelihood of an attack from the jungle. This is a circus show. It is disrespectful.'

Immediately, she wished she had not spoken. She had insulted her fellow investigators, upset many of them. More importantly, in that moment, she had succumbed to her own fears, and forgotten the

Doctor's counsel. There were no such things as spirits!

She wished he could have been here now. He would have explained all this, in terms that would have comforted her. He would have known what to do.

'Now come, Miss Leela,' said Mr Greeley, 'I'm sure, if the spirits were offended by our questioning, they would not –'

'No,' said Kate Fox suddenly in a loud, clear voice. 'No, Miss Leela is right. She must have sensed, as I do now, that the spirits do have an important message to reveal to us. We must be silent, so that they can be heard.' And with those words, the general good humour of a moment before was quelled.

Darkness seemed to draw in around the card tables, becoming almost a solid thing, pregnant with threat. Leela started to make out shapes and had to tell herself that they were only shadows of her mind. Even so, she could feel the skin of her neck prickling, and she caught herself holding her breath.

Then a message came at last. It was rapped out slowly, almost unbearably so – but before it was finished, Kate Fox had begun to speak.

'I have felt this spirit before,' she whispered. 'It is a powerful spirit, a forceful spirit. And it feels like, like –' The girl gave a theatrical gasp. 'He is angry. He has been wronged by somebody he once loved and watched over. Somebody in this room!'

'He is asking why,' wailed Maggie Fox. 'Over and over, he asks, "Why have you betrayed me? Why? Why? Why?"'

'He is tapping out a word,' said Kate. 'It is a word I do not know. Sev, Sev, Seva...teem. Sevateem!'

Even as she spoke, there was a jangling of bells, and a pale shape, small and round, came swooping through the air and only just

missed Leela's head. It made a circle of the tables, then landed in the centre of them with a resounding smack. It took all her self-control to not let out a cry of alarm – and a few of the others were decidedly less stoical.

'No!' she cried. 'I will not hear these lies. You wish for me to

believe that my old shaman is in this room but that cannot be! He

died a long way from here, and many, many years from now. It is

not possible that he could have followed me here, to this place and time. He could not have!'

The shape on the tables gave a little twitch and jangled again, and Leela could see now that it was a tambourine. She had seen it

before, before the lights had gone out – lying on a chest of drawers, where no one present could have reached it.

'Neeva is here,' said Kate, 'and he fears that you, Miss Leela, are making the same mistake that he once made.'

'You have turned your back on everything he taught you,' said

Maggie. 'You have rejected all that you know in your heart to be

true.'

'You are listening,' hissed Kate, 'to the voice of the Evil One.'

'I am so very sorry, my dear.'

Almost as soon as she had left the sisters' suite, Leela had felt a great shadow lifting from her. The corridors of the hotel were well lit, laid with deep carpet, and she could hear children running and laughing on the floor below this one. It felt like a different world to the one from which she had just fled.

She had stopped by the stairs, leaning against the balcony rail,

breathing hard, willing her heart to slow to its normal pace.

She was touched to see that Mr Greeley had come after her.

‘I would not have asked you to join me tonight,’ he said, hovering at her shoulder, ‘if I had thought it might upset you.’

‘I am not upset,’ snapped Leela. ‘I am angry – with myself.’

‘You have no cause to be. I think the spirits’ message left us all a touch unnerved.’

‘There are no spirits!’ she asserted. ‘That much I do know.’

‘Before tonight,’ said Mr Greeley, ‘I might have said the same.

Now –’

‘Now,’ Leela interrupted him, ‘I must think as the Doctor would

have me think. I must find a... rational explanation for what I have just seen.’

‘What explanation could there be?’

‘There were two ladies!’ said Leela. ‘I remember now, I saw

them with Kate and Maggie yesterday, and again this morning.

They were older, but they had the same eyes, as if they were all of the same clan.’

Mr Greeley nodded. ‘Mrs Fox and Mrs Fish, the girls’ mother

and their older sister. They agreed to wait downstairs until our

sitting was concluded. They wanted it to be clear that they were not prompting the girls in any way.’

‘Then perhaps they broke that agreement.’

Leela was already hurrying down the stairs, and Mr Greeley

struggled to keep up with her.

‘You can think they are responsible for,’ he panted, ‘the knocks

in the walls, perhaps, but what about those that came from the

cupboards or the fireplace?'

'Any good hunter knows that sounds can mislead,' said Leela,

'and all the more so when they are made inside a wooden box.'

But the tambourine,' Mr Greeley persisted, 'and the spirit that

tapped Mrs Cavendish on the shoulder!'

'Then what of the sisters themselves? We have only the words of

the people beside them that their hands were held. In the dark, even I could not tell for sure.'

'You are talking about, if not friends, then associates of mine,'

Mr Greeley protested, 'respectable men, people of excellent

standing. I assure you, Miss Leela, that nobody in that room would have been party to such a deception.'

Leela paused at the next landing. 'Perhaps, then, you are correct.

Perhaps there was something in that room with us. Not a spirit,

because they do not exist, but something invisible. An invisible

creature, pretending to be a spirit.'

'But that's, I mean, you can't seriously imagine such a thing

exists?'

'I do not believe in spirits, Mr Greeley, but I do believe in

invisible creatures. I have seen them for myself.' Noticing Mr

Greeley's raised eyebrow, Leela quickly added, 'Once the Doctor

had made them visible, I saw them.'

'I see,' said Greeley hesitantly. 'Look, Miss Leela, this science, it is new to us all. I would wager that, if the Doctor were here, if he had seen what those girls can do, he would agree –'

'I also believe,' said Leela, warming to her theme, 'in machines

that can project sounds across great distances. We should inspect the walls of the sisters' suite, see if there are devices hidden within. Or perhaps the sisters are able to change their shapes. Yes, they could have reached around the tables with their tentacles, even while their hands were held.'

'Their tentacles?'

'Or they could have used powers of the mind to fog our senses, to trick us into seeing what was not there. They could have travelled in time, so that while they were beside us they were also standing outside the room or inside its cupboards. All of these things, I believe in. All of these things, I have seen.'

She saw that Mr Greeley was staring at her. His jaw had gone slack, and in his eyes Leela saw a familiar mixture of sympathy and dawning fear. It was the same look that the Doctor's friends had been giving her all week.

Mr Greeley was a kind man, however, and she had no wish to upset him. So she said 'But let us begin by asking questions of the 69 mother and the older sister.' And they resumed their descent.

Mrs Fox and Mrs Fish were in the hotel drawing room, where Mr Greeley had left them. They were surprised to see him back so soon, and asked if something was the matter. They swore that, while the sitting had been in progress upstairs, neither of them had moved from this spot – and there were plenty of witnesses to confirm their story.

Leela paced restlessly in the parlour of her own suite. Mr Greeley had advised her to get some sleep. He had promised her that things would look very different in the morning, but she couldn't put the memory of tonight's events out of her head.

Her instincts told her that something was wrong, dreadfully

wrong. There were forces at work in this hotel that she could not see and did not understand. She couldn't help but be concerned that the young Fox sisters didn't understand them either.

It could be hours before the Doctor returned. It could be too late by then.

The sisters and their guardians would most likely be asleep in

their bedrooms by now. She could sneak into their parlour. She

could search it for clues.

Leela had made up her mind. She was about to put her plan into

action when there was a soft tap at her door. She opened it, and was astonished to find twelve-year-old Kate Fox on the threshold,

dressed in a long, white nightdress.

'Why are you here?' she asked suspiciously.

Kate pushed her way into the room before Leela could stop her.

Her lips were tightly pursed as if suppressing a grin – and, for a moment, Leela thought she could see a mischievous glint in the

girl's eye. 'You left the sitting so suddenly,' she said. 'There was more that the spirits wanted you to hear.'

'I will not listen to it,' said Leela.

'Do you fear the truth of their words so much?'

'I am a warrior of the Sevateem. I fear nothing, least of all that which does not exist.'

'The spirits are real, Miss Leela. Did you not hear them tonight?

Did you not see the evidence that they were among us? You

believed in them once.'

'That was before I met the Doctor, before he opened my eyes.'

'Oh, the Doctor!' spat Kate, and her face crumpled into a girlish

scowl. ‘The spirits know of him. That is what Neeva wished to tell you: that you most not trust him, that your Doctor will fill your head with lies.’

Leela had been holding the door open. She let it go now, let it

slam shut, as she rounded on her unwanted visitor. ‘Who told you about Neeva?’ she demanded. ‘How did you know of the Evil One, and the name of my tribe? Tell me!’

The confidence drained from Kate Fox’s face, and she took a step backwards.

Then she pushed out her lower lip, stubbornly, and insisted, ‘I can feel them. I know them. My sister and I, we have always known the spirits – and now they have chosen to know us, and to make themselves known through us.’

Leela seized her by the arms, and shook her. ‘Do you not understand?’ she pleaded. ‘I have been to many places, seen many great wonders. I know that there are no spirits – but there are worse things out there, evil things.’

‘Let me go!’ Kate squealed, struggling to escape. ‘You are hurting me!’

‘If you have been “chosen”, if something has indeed contacted you, then you could be in danger. You must tell me the truth.’

‘It is the Doctor who is the Evil One!’

‘Do they whisper in your head? What do they say? What do they want?’

Kate tore herself free and retreated to a corner of the room. ‘You have angered them,’ she wailed, and suddenly Leela could hear the

knocking of the spirits again, emanating from the walls around her.

‘They are filled with rage, and they will not be quieted. They are trying to break in here. You must run, Miss Leela. Run while you

can!’

‘I have already told you,’ growled Leela, ‘I am a warrior of the

Sevateem. I do not run away.’

And she took two steps across the room, grabbed Kate by her

right arm, spun her around and pressed the blade of her knife to the child’s throat.

‘Hear me, “spirits”,’ she called out, spitting out the last word with venom. ‘I have your servant, and I will kill her if you do not do as I say. Get out of her mind, and her sister’s mind. Leave this world

alone and return to your own!’

The knocks came thick and fast now, more forceful than ever,

until Leela thought they might break down the walls.

‘What are they saying?’ she hissed in Kate’s ear.

‘You, you were right. They are not of this world. They –’ Kate

was trembling in Leela’s grip, but suddenly she stiffened. When she next spoke, it was in a voice much deeper, more powerful, than her own.

‘Leela of the Sevateem,’ she boomed. ‘You know not the forces

with which you are meddling. Let the girl go or we will destroy

you.’

It was what Leela had been waiting to hear – but at the same

time, the voice sent a chill through her. She had hoped she might be wrong.

The Fox sisters hadn’t contacted any spirits–but, whether they

knew it or not, whether they had been tricked or had made their choices willingly, they were being used by something. Something hostile. Something alien.

Something that wanted a way into their world.

'Let the girl go!' Kate repeated in that same dreadful voice. And then, in her own voice, panic-stricken: 'Miss Leela, I can't hold them back. They're coming!'

The knocking was louder than ever, pounding in Leela's head, stopping her from thinking. All she knew was that she had to act and she could only think of one thing she could do, one way to end this. The spirits – the aliens – she could not touch, but if they were so concerned about Kate, if she was so important to them...

She knew the Doctor didn't like her using her knife. But what choice did she have?

'I am not bluffing,' she yelled. 'I will slit her throat if that is what it takes to stop you.' To Kate, she whispered, 'I am sorry.'

She pressed the point of her blade into the girl's soft skin.

Kate Fox screamed and fainted – and the knocking ceased at once. Then the parlour door flew open, and before Leela could fully turn somebody had cannoned into her side and was wresting the knife from her grip.

The Doctor had returned just in time.

After that, they couldn't leave fast enough.

'I'll never be able to show my face around here again,' the Doctor muttered as he strode off Broadway into the city's unlit back streets.

'Do you hear that?' he called back to Leela over his shoulder. 'I'll have to get a new face!'

‘I am sorry,’ said Leela, ‘but I believed we were all in danger. I had to –’

‘Had to act like a savage!’ the Doctor interrupted.

‘That is not fair!’

‘Always reaching for a knife or a janis thorn instead of pausing to think.’ He jabbed a finger to his temple in illustration of the point.

‘You were not there. I tried to work things out, as you always say I should do. But the younger sister did say –’

‘She wanted to scare you,’ the Doctor chided her. ‘She was trying

to make you believe – and after that, she was just trying to save her own life.’

‘I was not the only one to believe. Mr Greeley, I think, is not a

stupid man, but still he accepted that the sisters had contacted

beings from elsewhere.’

‘Yes, well.’ The Doctor softened his tone. ‘I suppose Kate and

Margaret Pox will fool better-qualified investigators than you in

their time.’

‘You know something of their future?’

‘Oh, yes,’ said the Doctor. ‘Their little parlour tricks spawned an entire movement – a religion, you might even say. A few years from now, you won’t be able to move around here for so-called mediums

plying their trade.’

‘But then,’ said Leela carefully, ‘how can you be so certain that –’

‘They confessed!’ announced the Doctor. ‘That’s how I can be so

certain. The older sister, what was her name?’

‘Maggie,’ said Leela. ‘Margaret.’

‘In forty years, Margaret Fox will appear on stage in front of two thousand people and admit to being a fraud. She’ll show them how

it was all done. Cracking of the toe joints, that was her signature trick – simple, but very effective. She and her sister could produce percussive sounds at will, without appearing to move a muscle.’

‘But, Doctor,’ said Leela, ‘that does not explain how they knew

so much about my past – like Neeva’s name.’

They had reached the TARDIS, parked on a street corner. The

Doctor rested a hand on its wood, and then laid his head on that

hand as if weary. ‘Leda,’ he said without looking at her, ‘how long have we been here, in New York? How long did we stay at

Barnum’s Hotel?’

‘Four days,’ said Leda.

‘And so did the Fox sisters,’ said the Doctor, ‘and the rest of their family. Now, how many conversations did we have in the public

rooms of that hotel? How many strangers did we talk to, and how

often did they ask about your background?’

‘Oh,’ said Leela. ‘You mean they just... eavesdropped?’

She was almost embarrassed by the simplicity of it all – and,

although there was still much she did not understand, she asked no more questions. She knew, in any case, that the answers would all

boil down to the same thing.

‘So, there were no aliens here,’ she said, ‘and no powers of the

mind.’

‘And absolutely no spirits,’ said the Doctor as he unlocked the

TARDIS doors and ushered his companion inside. ‘Just two young

girls, looking for attention – and creating their own very special kind of magic.’

The Fall of the Druids

David N Smith

An adventure of the Fifth Doctor, with Tegan, Turlough and Kamelion

Tegan stared at the skulls on top of the gateway. To her mind they presented an obvious 'Keep Out' message that required no explanation. To the Doctor, they clearly meant the opposite.

'Come on in, Tegan,' he called back, as he blithely strolled into the settlement. 'And don't worry about the ornamentation. They're just there to fend off evil spirits.'

'They seem to be working,' muttered Tegan, glaring at Turlough as he loitered nervously by the entrance.

She stepped forward hesitantly, looking about warily at the round thatched huts, sturdy animal enclosures and the massive wooden palisade that encircled the entire hilltop settlement. The air was heavy with the smell of wood-fires, compost and dung, all of which recalled happy memories of her father's farm in Brisbane.

'It's definitely Earth,' mumbled Turlough as he cupped a hand over his nose and mouth. 'You can tell from the smell.'

'It's a working farm,' growled Tegan defensively as she threw the boy one of her favourite disparaging looks. 'It's probably a bit much for your delicate senses.'

'It is a very primitive settlement,' Turlough remarked, glancing at the Doctor. 'This must be several hundred years before our previous visit?'

'Judging by the roundhouses, I'd say we're in the late Iron Age,' replied the Doctor, leaning over a fence to scratch an inquisitive ox behind its ear. 'It looks very much like a Celtic hill fort to me.'

'Hill fort?' exclaimed Tegan as she gazed around at the wattle-

and-daub huts. ‘It’s barely a village!’

‘That’s archaeologists for you,’ he replied, strolling through the animal pens. ‘Always naming things before they have a clue what

they are.’

The Doctor stopped, suddenly aware that a young boy had

appeared in the doorway of the nearest roundhouse. He was staring

at them with wide eyes full of fear.

‘Try to blend in,’ the Doctor whispered to Tegan. ‘Act as if it’s

perfectly natural for us to be here.’

Tegan glanced at the boy’s simple woollen garments, and then

looked down at her own striking multi-coloured cotton dress. She

shot a sceptical frown at the man in his Edwardian cricket outfit.

‘I’m not sure that’s going to work.’

‘Help! Father!’ the boy yelled. ‘Deceangli!’

‘I guess not,’ replied the Doctor dryly.

‘Us? Deceangli?’ cried Turlough incredulously. ‘I don’t think so.

We don’t even know what Deceangli are! Do we?’

‘They were a Celtic tribe from the west of Britain,’ the Doctor

commented informatively. ‘With whom we have absolutely no

association!’

A burlyman with a thick, dark moustache emerged from the

roundhouse, stepping protectively in front of the boy, his dark eyes fixed on the Doctor. In his right hand he held a hammer, which

looked as if it could normally be used to reshape iron but would

also be quite capable of reshaping unwanted strangers.

‘They’re not Deceangli,’ the stocky man told the boy.

‘We’re travellers,’ said the Doctor, doffing his hat politely and giving the man a broad, beaming smile.

‘Without weapons?’

‘I find it keeps me out of trouble,’ replied the Doctor, ignoring the incredulous stares of his companions.

‘More of a druid than a warrior, then?’ the man smiled, clapping a friendly hand on the Doctor’s back. ‘Welcome to Ordovice territory. I am Cadwallon. We should eat, drink and exchange news.’

‘That’s very gracious of you,’ replied the Doctor as he happily allowed himself to be led into one of the larger roundhouses.

Tegan and Turlough exchanged nervous glances.

‘Ladies first,’ Turlough gestured politely.

Tegan rolled her eyes in disdain. She knew she should try to be a little more patient with the boy, but his perpetual nervousness was really beginning to grate on her nerves.

She stepped forward, having to duck her head down to squeeze through the small opening, to discover that the Doctor and Cadwallon had stopped just inside, both surprised by the sudden appearance of another unexpected guest. A dark-haired woman was standing backlit by the flames of the cooking hearth, wrapped in a stained cloak. Her face was concealed beneath a blank, wooden mask.

Cadwallon whispered, his deep voice filled with reverence,

‘Ffion?’ The figure nodded slowly.

The Doctor frowned at the blank face, quietly raising his hand,

cautioning Tegan and Turlough not to venture any further into the

room. ‘They are coming, Cadwallon.’ Ffion’s voice was soft and

light, at odds with the nature of her appearance. ‘The enemy is

coming.’

‘The Deceangli?’ queried Turlough, still keen to distance himself

from the rival tribe.

‘The Romans,’ whispered the wooden-faced woman.

‘Romans?’ The Doctor looked up, his eyes sparkling with

interest. ‘Are you sure?’

‘I have seen the signs.’

‘Ah, you’re a soothsayer,’ the Doctor raised his eyebrows

enquiringly. ‘You predict the future?’

‘I am Vate.’ The woman retorted sharply. ‘My words are not

vague prophecy. They are fact. It was written in the skies, in wind and in the blood of the dying. The Romans will come this day.’

‘Then we will fight them,’ Cadwallon growled, raising his

hammer.

‘Then you will die,’ replied Ffion coldly. ‘You would do better to look to the lives of the children than to throw your own away. If

you would fight, then join the forces at Mona.’ The dark-cloaked

woman stepped backwards, moving around the smoke that suddenly

filled the space where she stood, then disappeared into the shadows at the back of hut.

‘Sadly, friend, there will be no time for food,’ Cadwallon

muttered as he turned and walked out of the hut, thinking nothing of Ffion’s vanishing trick. ‘We must prepare to meet the enemy.’

Tegan moved around the fire, hesitantly stepping into the

shadows where she had last seen the masked woman.

‘Did she really just disappear into thin air?’ Tegan asked, worried that the question might make her sound foolish.

Turlough shook his head. ‘Impossible. There must be another

door,’ he insisted, staring at the solid clay walls.

They both glanced at the Doctor, expecting an answer, but found

him lost in thought.

‘If she’s right about the Romans, then that would make this

around the middle of the 1st-century AD,’ the Doctor muttered, his eyes suddenly gleaming with excitement. ‘If we’re lucky, we might

get the chance to meet Boudicca!’

‘The Killoran sculptor?’ Turlough frowned.

‘The Queen of the Iceni.’ The Doctor’s shoulders sagged. ‘You

really didn’t learn anything in that school, did you?’

‘I never saw any reason to take an interest in human history,’

Turlough shrugged dismissively.

‘You might want to revise that opinion,’ Tegan chided, never one

to miss an opportunity to put the boy in his place, ‘now that you’re 76

stood in the middle of it.’

Turlough glared at her and said, ‘I could or, given that they’re

about to start killing each other, we could just go back to the TARDIS and leave.'

'Leave?' the Doctor repeated, sounding almost petulant. But we've only just arrived.'

'So?' Tegan cut in, seeing the disappointment flooding into the Doctor's eyes. 'Turlough's right. For once. Do we really want to get caught up in the middle of a war?'

The Doctor sighed. 'Very well. I suppose it is the sensible thing to do.' He led the way back into the daylight, pausing briefly to push his hat back on, before realising the whole village was in chaos. Tegan saw Cadwallon lift his son into a horse-drawn cart and kiss him briefly on the forehead. The sadness in their eyes was obvious. Father and son both knew this was no ordinary goodbye.

At that moment a distant thundering noise began, causing the worried Celts to fall silent as frightened eyes turned towards the east In the distance, a vast plume of dust was rising and discolouring the sky, while from beneath the brown cloud were emerging hundreds of Roman soldiers, their armour and spear-tips glinting in the sunlight.

'Come on!' Turlough yelled, lurching forward into the crowd of frightened people. 'We can still make it back to the TARDIS!'

He scrambled forward, racing back out of the eastern gateway. Tegan hurried after him, but froze in horror as she saw a Roman rider gallop across her path.

The rider thrust his spear towards her. She felt the blade pierce her side.

Tegan stumbled backwards, falling into the Doctor's arms. He carried her unceremoniously into the back of the horse-drawn cart among the terrified children.

'Cadwallon, please!' the Doctor yelled, as the villagers battled to shut the gates. You cannot win this!'

'I am not afraid to die,' Cadwallon growled. 'But save your friend! Save Lythan!'

The Doctor nodded, his face filled with regret as he leapt up onto the cart and picked up the reins and whip. With a single crack of leather and a yell from the Doctor, the cart plunged forwards, driving through the settlement and out through the western gateway.

'Lythan!' the Doctor called back to Cadwallon's son. 'Where's the safest place to go!'

'The island!' shouted the boy, pointing a trembling arm out towards the sea. 'To Mona!'

Tegan tried to sit up, to see where the boy was pointing, but the

effort suddenly seemed too great.

The Doctor looked back at her. She followed his gaze.

The cloth of her dress had been stained red.

Blood. Her blood.

She closed her eyes.

She heard the Doctor crack the whip once more.

Tegan woke up in darkness.

Gradually, as her eyes adjusted, a weak firelight from across the

room was illuminating the wooden rafters above her and the curved clay wall that encircled her. She was pressed between warm blankets of animal fur and a thick, straw mattress, which were managing to keep her warm despite the fact that she could see her breath fogging in the cold air. She could hear the sound of a boy – it must be Lythan – gently sobbing at the foot of the bed, while she could see the Doctor, sitting thoughtfully, silhouetted against the flames of a small hearth.

'The girl will live,' cut a cold voice through the darkness, coming from inches away from her face. Tegan turned in shock, peering up into the gloom until suddenly she could make out the dark shape of a wooden face hovering over her.

'You have my thanks, Ffion.' The Doctor turned away from the fire, his face lost in shadow.

Tegan tried to sit up but a stabbing pain in her side stopped her. On reflex she reached a hand towards her wound, her fingers discovering linen bindings had covered it.

'I thought I was dead,' Tegan whispered, as she stared up at the impassive wooden mask.

'You almost were,' remarked the Doctor as he stood and walked towards them. 'You almost certainly would have been without Ffion's help.'

'How?'

'These hands hold the sacred power of healing,' Ffion, still in her mask, turned to examine her own very human and delicate fingers.

'Now rest. You will need your strength for the battles ahead.'

Ffion stood and nodded curtly at the Doctor. She reached out a

hand to the red-eyed Lythan, who clasped it tightly in his own,

before they both stepped out through the doorway.

Tegan frowned up at the Doctor as he stared down at her, his

hands in his pockets and his face unreadable. ‘Did she heal me with magic?’

‘More likely herbal painkillers and a skilled hand with a needle

and thread.’

‘You said she was a soothsayer,’ said Tegan as she tried again to

sit up, ‘not a doctor.’

‘She’s a Vate. It’s one of three important roles in the Celtic

spiritual world. The others are the Druid and the Bard, but they’re all people of learning,’ the Doctor replied quietly. ‘She’ll have spent many years training in medicine and, shall we say, more

otherworldly arts. The people here don’t separate them as you or I might. In many ways, to these people, they’re one and the same.

The knowledge and wisdom has been amassed and passed on for

hundreds of years, through stories, songs and by rote, While they

are highly skilled in writing and reading, they never commit their wisdom to paper, always wary of how the knowledge could be

abused by the uninitiated.’

Tegan frowned, confused by the sense of wonder she could hear

in her friend’s voice.

‘I’m grateful either way,’ she murmured, her tiredness and

gratitude softening her usual irascible tone. ‘But what about

Turlough?’

‘I don’t know,’ replied the Doctor as he sat down on the edge of

the bed, finally turning his face towards the firelight. ‘Last time I saw him, he was heading for the TARDIS.’

‘Not very reliable, is he?’ Tegan muttered. ‘Always running off.

Never a thought for anyone else.’

The Doctor let out an exasperated sigh.

‘Oh, it takes more than being speared to stop me mouthing off,’

she said, almost laughing, before a fresh jolt of pain made her gasp and her eyes water. ‘Where are we anyway?’ she asked after getting her breath back.

‘Ah,’ the Doctor mumbled. ‘I was rather hoping you weren’t

going to ask that.’

‘Where?’ Tegan barked.

‘We crossed the sea channel by boat, put the water between the

Romans and us. We’re on the Isle of Mona, in the druidic training

centre, the very heart of the Celtic spiritual world.’

‘Never heard of it.’

‘You wouldn’t.’ replied the Doctor, still seemingly keen to avoid

her gaze. ‘The Romans destroyed it, slaughtering every man,

woman and child.’

‘I love travelling with a Time Lord. So many history lessons I

didn’t know I didn’t want to learn.’ Tegan scowled at him, pulling up the animal skin blanket tightly under her chin, knowing she

already knew the answer to the question she was about to ask.

‘When will all this happen?’

‘Best guess?’ he paused. ‘A day, maybe two.’

‘Then we have to get out of here.’

‘We can’t,’ the Doctor replied, finally turning to look her straight in the eye. ‘The Romans have taken the opposite shore. We’re

penned in.’

Turlough shivered, frozen to the core from having spent the night

lying in a damp, rocky hole by the river. He peered cautiously out of his hiding place towards the blue police box that stood by the

bank, a sense of relief flooding through him. Even if the Doctor and Tegan had been killed then at least he would still be able to escape from the Earth and its brutal, primitive inhabitants.

Glancing downstream he could see a group of Roman soldiers

washing in the cold waters, laughing and joking, but all with their swords and spears within easy reach. He knew he would need to be

quick to cross the gap to the TARDIS before they noticed him.

Why hadn’t the Doctor and Tegan just run, like he’d said? If they

had, they would all be there now. They would all have been able to get in the TARDIS and go. Instead, it was just him and another

desperate run for freedom.

He sprang forward, crouching and running as fast as he could

until the tall blue doors loomed before him. He put his hand against the wood and pushed, but the doors refused to open. Hope was

replaced by panic. Gripping hold of the handle, he pulled, then

pushed, rattling the door in its frame. Nothing! In his mind’s eye he could clearly see the Doctor closing the TARDIS door behind him.

He slammed his fist against the wood. He was furious that, after

everything he had been through, he was about to die as just another faceless victim in someone else’s war.

Then the door opened.

Shocked and surprised, but never one to miss an opportunity to survive, Turlough leapt inside. Dashing forward, he collided with the console and slammed his hand down on the nearest lever. His eyes darted sideways, suddenly aware of the figure leaning on the console.

'You let me in?'

Kamelion slowly turned his face towards Turlough.

'You appeared to be in some distress,' the machine replied calmly.

'I'm grateful,' Turlough muttered, straightening his tie, as he eyed the silver android with suspicion. 'But what are you doing in the control room?'

'It was merely a random chance,' Kamelion replied, tilting his head. 'I was accessing the databanks.'

'Really?'

'I would not lie,' Kamelion raised his chin, as if his pride had

somehow been dented by the suggestion.

'Oh, you would.' Turlough stepped away, turning his attention to the console. 'It's what you were built for.'

Turlough moved his hands across the console, checking the co-ordinates and read-outs.

'What is it that you are attempting to do?' Kamelion enquired in his calm and precise manner, his eyes following Turlough's movements.

Turlough sighed, unsure how to tell the android what had happened, or how it would react to the news.

'I think the Doctor and Tegan are dead,' he said bluntly.

The robot's head dipped slightly.

'But I think I can get us out of here,' Turlough said softly, unsure why he was attempting to reassure a machine. 'Away from Earth, at any rate.'

Kamelion raised his chin, levelling his dark eyes at Turlough.

'Your information is incorrect,' the machine purred, as a metal finger stabbed a button on the console. 'This scanner setting is keyed to the Doctor's brain pattern. He is alive and well, approximately twenty kilometres north of this position.'

Turlough rounded the console, glancing from the android to the monitor screen, unable to believe his eyes. There was a single blue diamond gently pulsing away at the edge of a map of an island. He should have known better than to doubt the Doctor's ability to get out of seemingly impossible situations.

'If they are in danger,' Kamelion began, its eyes seeming to stare straight through Turlough, 'then we should assist them.'

'There's nothing we can do,' Turlough protested, pointing at the coastline. 'The Roman army is camped along here. Between us and the Doctor.'

Kamelion lowered his eyes. 'I am programmed for covert military operations.'

A blaze of red light erupted around the android's silver body, swirling around him as his form suddenly shifted. Turlough took a

step back as the machine's stiff, metal face became soft flesh and a military uniform seemed to materialise in the air around him as his form broadened into that of an imposing, square-jawed Roman centurion.

Kamelion looked at his feet, wriggled his toes in his sandals and then grinned at Turlough.

'I will be able to acquire a uniform for you from their camp,' he said in a deep, accented voice. He strode around the console and activated the scanner, turning to watch the main screen open onto a view of green hills and valleys. 'But we will need a local guide.'

With another twist of the centurion's hand the screen zoomed in on a battered and bloody figure hiding among the river reeds.

Turlough stepped up to the screen and stared into the familiar but frightened face that cowered behind the grass.

'Cadwallon,' he whispered. 'He survived.'

'Can you persuade him to assist us?' Kamelion asked, the centurion's dark brown eyes seeming to glimmer with enthusiasm.

Turlough hesitated, aware that he was being included in the machine's foolhardy plan.

'Yes,' he said reluctantly, 'of course I can.'

The Doctor stood on the clifftop, hands deep in his pockets, watching the distant shore. He could see the Romans on the mainland beach, as they worked on the construction of a fleet of wooden boats. He knew it wouldn't be long before they reached the island. History itself left him in no doubt of the bloody and violent day that lay ahead. He bowed his head, for once feeling powerless

against unfolding events. Time and tide wait for no man. Not even a Time Lord. The weight of his knowledge suddenly felt heavy. It was a burden, he knew, but it was one he had been taught to carry without complaint.

He was distracted by a soft, feminine voice behind him. 'They will not cross the channel today. I have turned the wind against them.'

'Oh, Ffion,' the Doctor replied without turning, 'if you could do that, then we would be safe forever.'

Ffion laughed. 'Tomorrow the people will be ready for battle.'

The Doctor frowned, glancing back at the masked woman. Behind her, trudging across the rough ground, snaked a line of white-robed men, their middle-aged faces set with stern resolve.

'Druids,' the Doctor smiled, allowing a measure of respect into his voice. 'Men of peace and learning, lawgivers, judges, advisers. Not much use in a war, surely?'

'They have other talents that can be employed on the battlefield.'

'So, the Druids and the Votes are here,' said the Doctor as he watched the figures move towards the shore. 'What about the Bards?'

'They will sing tales of our victory.'

'I wish I could share your optimism.'

Ffion chuckled, her eyes gleaming from behind the hard, wooden mask. 'You have the audacity to call yourself a Lord of Time? Yet you are more its slave than its master!'

The Doctor balked.

‘Oh, we know the future you believe will happen. But it shall not

come to pass.’

‘How could you know who I am and what will happen?’ he asked, feeling a chill as he stared at the wooden face.

‘The wisdom taught here on Mona is more ancient and more powerful than you will ever know.’

‘Is it really?’ The Doctor glared at the woman. ‘Or did you just listen in on a private conversation?’

‘Don’t underestimate us, Doctor. We have the power to destroy our enemy.’

The Doctor hesitated, doubts blossoming in his mind.

‘What power?’ he asked, stepping up to tower over the woman. ‘How could you possibly stop an entire Roman legion?’

‘I am not about to share our secrets with you,’ the woman seethed. ‘Your loyalties do not lie with us. You have your own cause, do you not?’

The Doctor stepped back, suddenly wary of how much the woman knew or had guessed.

‘Time’s flow cannot be changed, Ffion,’ the Doctor insisted. ‘It’s too strong.’

‘Even the most powerful river may be dammed, diverted, bridged or crossed.’ The woman in the wooden mask walked slowly towards him, coming so close that he could feel her hot breath on

his skin.

‘We have the power to stop the enemy, Doctor. And you should

be glad of it.’ The woman’s eyes narrowed behind the slits in her

mask. ‘If your prophecy comes true, it means the deaths of you,

your friend, of all of us. I offer life. Are you such a fool that you would cling so tightly to your beliefs?’

She left the question hanging in the air, her eyes desperately

trying to read the Doctor’s impassive face. He said nothing, neither daring to answer nor wanting to.

Ffion snorted her disapproval. ‘You are afraid of what you know

you can do. Why? Is it cowardice? If so, it is a weakness that I do not share. You saved many lives from the slaughter at the village, so I will choose to believe that you are not our enemy.’ She pulled her black cloak tight around her and turned away. ‘Make sure you do

not become one.’

Turlough felt ridiculous. They may have called it a Roman military uniform but to him it still felt like a jerkin, sandals and a skirt.

Much to his annoyance, it also appeared that Kamelion was

enjoying the whole experience. The awkward, retiring robot was

gone, replaced by an energetic centurion, one perfectly at ease in the Roman camp. He gave orders, laughed at jokes, discussed tactics

with the senior officers and had become irritatingly popular with

what seemed like the entire legion. Kamelion’s plan was simple. By infiltrating the Roman camp the three of them had gained access to the resources they needed to reach the island. They would slip

across in the attack, then rescue the Doctor and Tegan. Simple

enough, but insanely dangerous if you put any value on your own

life.

Turlough took comfort from the fact that Cadwallon seemed even more nervous, which was hardly a surprise given that he was one Celt surrounded by thousands of Romans. The worried man was nervously fingering his upper lip, from which he had cut off his thick Celtic moustache so that he could blend in with his clean-shaven enemies.

'I can't believe you stayed to fight,' said Turlough as they watched the first few Roman boats set sail for the island, taking advantage of that morning's shift in wind.

'I have no fear of dying,' the man explained earnestly. 'I believe my stay in the Otherworld will be short, I will soon be reborn in a new body, in a new life.'

'Reincarnation?'

'You do not believe?'

'I'm afraid not.' Turlough tried to hide his scorn of the beliefs of this primitive but brave man. He suddenly recalled his own past.

'When I lost my mother, I knew it was forever.'

'It is why you run.' Cadwallon said softly, looking uncomfortable and embarrassed. 'Why I ran.'

'At least you were prepared to fight.'

'But my death would have parted me from my son. Forever. Remember Ffion's words?'

'You listened to the soothsayer?' queried Turlough, unable to stop a smile from slipping across his face.

'Always,' Cadwallon shrugged. 'She is never wrong.'

They fell into a thoughtful silence as they pushed their boat out into the water, but the quiet was soon shattered by the arrival of Kamelion. The square-jawed Roman centurion splashed through the water, leaping into the boat with a grin, followed seconds later by a handful of excited Roman auxiliaries. Cadwallon and Turlough barely had time to scramble aboard before the oars hit the water.

'Come on!' Kamelion shouted at the bedraggled troops. 'I want us to be the first on that island! Get rowing!'

The auxiliaries did not hesitate. They leapt into action, all eager to obey their orders. In minutes, the boat was at the leading edge of the fleet. As they approached the island, Turlough spotted the opposing force waiting on the dunes. Dozens of white-robed figures 84 stood in a circle. Gathered around them were hundreds of rugged and tattooed warriors waving their swords angrily in the air. He thought he saw the Doctor standing at the back with his hands in his pockets and wearing his panama hat, watching the Roman army slip across the water.

Kamelion's vessel was indeed the first to hit the beach and he was the first one down into the surf, hurriedly pulling it up onto the land, while dozens more boats came ashore around them.

A series of fires suddenly burst into life behind the ranks of the Celts. Bathed in the light, the Druids raised their arms to the sky and began to chant, their voices thundering in unison. Seconds later, dozens of black-cloaked women emerged from the ranks of the warriors, each carrying a flaming torch, their dark hair streaming in wind as their wailing voices joined the chorus against the invaders.

The Romans stopped in their tracks. Hundreds of Roman soldiers found themselves paralysed. Many turned pale, some tried to glance at their companions, but the vast majority were completely frozen, staring in horror at the Celts, mesmerised and transfixed.

Turlough knew it must be Ffion at the top of the largest rock on the cliff As he watched the wooden mask gazing down on the terrified army, he suddenly realised he could move, that he alone seemed to be unaffected by the paralysis. He wanted to run.

'You came to slaughter us,' Ffion yelled. 'But the gods themselves defend this place! And you are nothing but mortal men!'

Turlough looked along the line of Celts, noticing with horror that a large number of their warriors were notching arrows and drawing back their bowstrings.

Turlough turned to Cadwallon's wide-eyed face. 'Run!' he screamed, but all the man could do was whimper and point at Ffion as she loomed over them. Turlough grabbed the terrified man and hauled him over his shoulder, trying desperately to ignore the whistle of the first deadly rain of arrows.

The Doctor watched as Ffion lowered her torch, signalling the bowmen to fire their first volley. The sky was suddenly filled with arrows, arcing upwards, and then accelerating down towards paralysed Roman troops. 'You shouldn't be able to do this! You must stop this slaughter!' the Doctor shouted, making no attempt to hide his anger.

Ffion didn't even glance at him. She said nothing, her blank mask hiding any expression the Doctor might read. The arrows fell on the defenceless Roman troops. Those that were hit became free of the paralysis in their last, desperate seconds of life. The soldiers' screams were so loud that they blotted out the Druids' chanting.

‘We will –’ Ffion began, but her sentence was cut short, as the

Doctor grabbed hold of her cloak and pulled. She tottered on top of the rock.

‘I can’t let you do this, Ffion. 1 can’t let you win!’ the Doctor

cried, his voice cracking with desperation. ‘History demands I stop you!’

He tugged again, pulling her off the rock, sending her flailing to the ground. She crashed into the earth, the flaming torch spinning away from her hand, her mask falling from her face.

From the beach below there came a cry of hundreds of voices.

Suddenly, the Roman troops were moving again, storming up the

beach towards the Celts.

The Doctor frowned, looking down at the wooden mask lying in

the mud. He knelt down, picked up the mask and held it up to the

firelight. He pulled his glasses from his pocket, flipped them open and pushed them onto his nose.

‘The spell is broken,’ the Doctor muttered as he studied the mask, before peering over the rim of his glasses at the black-cloaked

figure that was struggling to stand in the muddy ground.

The face that looked back at him was pale and beautiful, her eyes

impossibly deep with sorrow, with a single tear running down her

left cheek.

‘You have brought death upon us all,’ the woman whispered.

The Doctor stared at her, frowning at how small and human she

really was.

Turlough scrambled up the rocks, all too aware people were dying

on the beach behind him. He had been forced to literally haul

Cadwallon away from the danger, but the man finally seemed to have returned to his senses. Turlough paused briefly at the top of a rocky bluff, watching as the charging Roman troops collided with the Celtic warriors, searching for a glimpse of Kamelion among the chaos.

Turning his attention away from the fighting, he saw Cadwallon hurrying towards the Doctor and Ffion. They had both seen the Doctor pull the woman from the rock, watched as she had fallen backwards, shattering the moment of awe that she had commanded over the stupefied Romans. He could see that she was now standing beside the Doctor, her unmasked face pretty and pale in the firelight, but her eyes filled with anger and defeat. She spared Turlough and Cadwallon only a glance before running towards the battle, towards where her people were dying.

Cadwallon watched her go.

The Doctor wasted no time on pleasantries: 'You weren't

affected by the paralysis?' It was barely a question.

'Standing still when your life is danger has never seemed very bright to me,' remarked Turlough pointedly, glancing towards the fighting.

The Doctor nodded but turned his attention to the mask he was holding, flipping it over and over in his hands.

'Perhaps your non-human biology protected you,' the Doctor suggested, never taking his eyes off the wooden face.

‘Or perhaps I’m very good at running away.’

The Doctor shot him a cold stare.

‘Can we please have this conversation somewhere safer?’ asked Turlough, ignoring the Doctor’s expression. He realised he would need a different tack to thaw the Time Lord’s icy temperament.

‘Where’s Tegan?’

‘And my son?’ Cadwallon added.

The Doctor’s face unfroze in a heartbeat. He whipped off his glasses and nicked them away inside his jacket, as if finally aware of the screaming, fighting and fires all around them.

‘This way,’ he said, ‘and quickly.’

Tegan woke to the sound of battle. She struggled to prop herself up on her elbows, only able to watch as Lythan picked up a small iron blade and hid nervously by the doorway. She knew that if the Romans found them then they were dead. The boy was no match for a Roman legionary and she didn’t have the strength to move, let alone fight.

She held her breath as a figure loomed in the doorway.

A massive, threatening Roman strode towards them, his hard face blackened by smoke and mud, a short sword gripped firmly in his right hand. Lythan pounced from his hiding place, his tiny knife clashing uselessly against his opponent’s armour. The soldier grabbed and twisted the boy’s forearm, forcing him to drop the knife. Their only weapon clattered uselessly to the floor.

The Roman turned his dark eyes towards Tegan and gave her a grin. ‘I apologise if I scared you, Tegan. How are you feeling?’ he

asked, his face frowning in concern as he continued to keep the boy in the arm lock. ‘What?’ she yelled, confusion and alarm clouding

her brain. ‘Who are you?’

‘It’s me,’ the centurion replied, looking slightly hurt by the lack of recognition. ‘Kamelion.’

‘Oh.’ Tegan slumped back onto the straw mattress. ‘What are you

doing here?’

‘I thought that much was obvious. I was under the impression you

needed assistance,’ the centurion replied, letting go of Lythan who 87

had stopped struggling, realising the man was, somehow, Tegan’s

friend. Kamelion rubbed a broad hand over the child’s cropped hair.

‘This was the last location that the TARDIS scanners placed the

Doctor’s life-signs before we came looking for you.’

‘We?’

‘Myself and Turlough.’

‘And very grateful we are,’ replied the Doctor as he stepped into

the roundhouse. ‘Aren’t we?’

‘Yes, of course,’ agreed Tegan tersely, annoyed by the

implication that she would somehow be unappreciative of being

rescued, even by Turlough.

‘The Romans are winning the battle,’ the Doctor told them.

‘They’re destroying the buildings, burning the sacred groves.

Hundreds of people are dying.’

‘There’s nothing you could have done,’ Tegan bit her lip, unsure

what more to say. She knew from bitter experience how a moment

like this would hurt him, but she realised there were no more words of comfort she could offer.

‘They’re putting the entire Druidic culture to the sword. With no

written records, everything these people were, all their wisdom,

their knowledge and their culture will be lost forever. It’s the end of an entire world.’

‘It’s not your fault,’ Tegan tried, frightened by the horror in his voice. He said nothing for a moment. He just stared at her with

weary, empty eyes.

‘It won’t be long before they find us.’

Tegan stared at him, unsure what to say, waiting for him to

continue, wanting him to explain how he was going to save them.

‘What would you like me to do?’ Kamelion asked quietly.

‘Stand outside,’ the Doctor replied. ‘Tell them not to come in.’

Kamelion nodded and obeyed.

‘That’s the plan?’ Tegan gasped. ‘That’s never going to work!’

‘Father!’ Lythan leapt up as Cadwallon entered the roundhouse.

Tegan allowed herself a smile, glad to witness the reunion of father and son. Even Turlough, who was skulking in the doorway, looked

happy for them.

‘We will fight them when they come,’ Cadwallon whispered in

his son’s ear, clearly keen to reassure the terrified boy. ‘We will die together.’

This was not the reunion Tegan had been hoping for. She turned

her gaze on the Doctor as he stood in the centre of the room, silently staring at the mask in his hands.

‘There must be something you can do,’ Tegan cried.

The Doctor looked up. ‘It’s possible that Ffion was using this

mask to access a low-level psychic field. If so, there’s no reason I can’t do the same. I can create a perception filter around us, so the Romans will never know we’re here.’

Turlough coughed sceptically. ‘I’m sorry, but what psychic field

would that be?’

‘A generation of worship and belief would be more than enough

to create a psychic field and imbue the mask with the ability to

channel the energies involved.’

‘On a scale large enough to freeze thousands of professional

Roman soldiers?’ Turlough scoffed. ‘That’s ridiculous.’

‘You’d need a power source close by, one that was functioning

on the same psychic wavelength. A large amount of tinclavic

perhaps.’

Turlough stopped dead. ‘Kamelion?’

‘It’s how he’s able to adapt his appearance so perfectly,’ the

Doctor replied. ‘By showing you exactly what you expect to see.

It’s possible that Ffion deliberately summoned him to the

battlefield.’

‘That’s a bit of a leap,’ Turlough muttered softly. ‘You don’t

need psychic fields to explain any of this.’

The Doctor ignored him, sitting cross-legged on the floor, lifting the mask to his face and then gently pulling its leather strap tight behind his head. He closed his eyes, while the featureless wooden

mask flickered in the hearth light. Finally the Doctor sighed, opened his eyes and pulled off the mask. ‘The perception filter is now in

place,' he said confidently.

'If there is a psychic field,' muttered Turlough, never one to let his opinion be ignored.

'Yes,' the Doctor nodded. 'If.'

Tegan laid her head back on the straw.

'If,' she said. 'I remember telling Nyssa that my dad thought "if"

was the most powerful word in the English language.'

'Really? I'd have chosen "escaped",' muttered Turlough. 'Or

"free". Or even just "alive".'

They stared at the door. The battle beyond it was terrifying them

all. There was no doubt the Celts were being massacred. Lives were being lost and history was being written. All they could do was

endure it.

Kamelion stood guard over the roundhouse for two days. Usually

the house was ignored, but occasionally some of the Roman soldiers would wander too close and he would need to forcefully order them

away. There were times when Cadwallon had wanted to leave the

safety of the house, for him and his son to join the battle, but the 89

Doctor always managed to persuade him to stay. Despite his many

protests, there was only relief burning in Cadwallon's eyes as he

clung fiercely to his son.

On the dawn of the third day, Kamelion saw the last of the

soldiers climb back aboard their boats and set sail for the mainland.

The Doctor stepped out into the dawn light to watch the soldiers

go. Tegan, able to walk but still in pain, followed him, clearly keen not to stray too far from his protection. The smell of the smoking remains of the sacred groves and roundhouses couldn't disguise the

smell of death.

‘They left earlier than I expected,’ Kamelion observed dispassionately. Tegan envied him his apparent lack of emotion.

‘News from the mainland, I expect,’ the Doctor replied as he watched the boats sail away. ‘Boudicca has begun her rebellion. Many tribes will unite behind her, which isn’t a surprise given what’s just happened here.’

‘There was nothing you could do stop it.’ Tegan laid a hand on the Time Lord’s arm, once more giving voice to those few words of comfort. ‘We all know you can’t change history’

‘Really?’ queried Turlough, as he stood in the entrance of the roundhouse. ‘From where I was standing it looked like he made it happen.’

The Doctor unrolled his hat and pulled it on, the action preventing him from having to look into the eyes of his companions.

‘We should get back to the TARDIS,’ he muttered briefly, echoing Turlough’s sentiment of only days before. He set off in the direction of the beach.

‘What about the mask?’ Tegan called after him. ‘You can’t just leave it here, can you?’

‘It’s burning on the hearth,’ he replied, without looking back.

Kamelion watched as Turlough and Tegan said their goodbyes to Cadwallon and Lythan, before they turned and headed after the Doctor. The android followed silently behind them.

Once inside the relative safety of the TARDIS, Kamelion let his appearance shift back to its default setting. The image of the content centurion faded away. He knew that his biological companions still had unanswered questions. They were struggling to understand and come to terms with the events that had occurred on the island. He could sense the emotional turmoil coming off them in waves. He himself was not concerned with such issues. He had enjoyed his rare journey outside the safety of TARDIS, but whether it had been of his own choice or that of an outside influence now seemed

largely irrelevant.

He stood by the hatstand, awaiting further instructions and watched the others interact. Biological entities were always so interesting.

‘So?’ Tegan asked as the Doctor set the console’s coordinates.

The Doctor looked up, his eyes full of innocence.

‘So?’

‘Was there ever a psychic field?’ Turlough asked bluntly, his eyes betraying his uncertainty.

The Doctor punched a single button, examining the results on a monitor, his face as unreadable as Ffion’s mask.

‘If there was, then it’s gone now. Lost perhaps, along with so much else.’ He sighed. ‘You were there. You tell me.’

What Has Happened to the

Magic of ‘Doctor Who’?

IV

Gareth Roberts

Mr Philip Hinchcliffe,

BBC Producer, 'Doctor Who'

5th January 5977

Dear Mr Hinchcliffe,

I'm writing to say that with the most recent episode of 'Doctor Who', part one of the story 'The Face Of Evil', I shall no longer be watching the programme. It seems to me that it has lost the particular qualities it once possessed, that certain 'magic' that made Saturday teatimes so enjoyable. feel strongly that 'Doctor Who' has lost its innocence. In the days of UNIT and the Brigadier one could always tune in and rely on a good story with both its feet on the ground. With the Doctor living on Earth like us, there was always the feeling that the stories could actually happen. But since the new Doctor took over, the stories have become far too way-out and science-fictional. 'Doctor Who' is all about monsters and invasions. Now we rarely seem to have armies of monsters, but just one or two creatures or a villain. The stories themselves take place on strange alien planets most of the time, and there is a certain lack of originality in the re-telling of staples from the horror movies – Frankenstein, walking Egyptian mummies and, more recently, the disembodied hand, for example. Hoary old clichés all.

Now that Sarah has left the series the last link to normality has gone. The new girl is a barely dressed savage killer, again sacrificing the ingenuity and middlebrow intellectualism of the old 'Doctor Who' for the gory thrills and cleavage beloved of those laughable, creaking Hammer Horrors. Doctor Who himself is a

brooding, sombre Bohemian, and is very difficult for us to identify with. He's not the warm, cuddly 'uncle' figure he used to be. The

general level of morbidity is misplaced in a series that was

previously an enjoyable diversion for the family. 'Doctor Who' has 92

not become adult, Mr Hinchcliffe. With its clumsy shock tactics and affected amorality, it has become adolescent.

Mrs Jean Arrowsmith, Dundee

What Has Happened to the Magic of 'Doctor Who'? continues on page 123

93

Priceless Junk

Cavan Scott and Mark Wright

An adventure of the Sixth Doctor, with Peri

'Admit it, Doctor, you're enjoying yourself.'

'Enjoying myself? Enjoying myself? Peri, look at it: overbearing,

garish and just plain tacky. I'm sorry, but it's just not me.'

'Of course not, Doctor. Whatever you say.'

The Doctor and Peri were seated at a table that nestled before the large stage that dominated a cavernous auditorium. There was a

gabble of anticipation in the air from the other members of the

audience. Around them were people sat at other tables, while row

after row of theatre seating, ranged in a sweeping slope towards the back of the room, was full with people all directing their attention towards the stage.

A stage that, so far, remained resolutely empty.

Peri took a sip of the colourful cocktail through the straw that

emerged from the jungle of fruit and paper umbrellas that perched

on top of the glass. The Doctor could moan as much as he liked but there was no way one of his infamous moods was about to put a

damper on this evening. ‘Anyway,’ she continued, her eyes never

leaving the stage, ‘you’re only grumpy because you lost at cards. If you’re such a bad loser then I don’t know why you were gambling

in the first place.’

‘I wasn’t gambling,’ riposted the Doctor, his indignation reaching a previously unexplored level. ‘I was merely conducting an

experiment in probability. An experiment that was rendered useless by the fact that the croupier was obviously cheating.’ He folded his arms petulantly.

‘The house never loses, Doctor, and, besides, I kept telling you,

always double-down on eleven.’

The Doctor raised an eyebrow. ‘It worries me that somebody of

your innocent years knows so much about gambling.’

Peri shrugged. ‘Blame an errant mother with a demon eye for

roulette.’

‘Hmm,’ frowned the Doctor disapprovingly. ‘Well, Vegas wasn’t

like this in the old days.’

‘The old days? Doctor, this is 1971. You don’t get any more retro

than this.’

But the Time Lord wasn’t listening. He was staring into the

middle distance, a dreamy look on his face that told Peri he was lost in his memories, drifting back through the decades.

‘Oh, no –1957. Now that was a year! Back then Las Vegas was

truly–’ he struggled for a moment, searching for the rightward ‘–

fabulous. A sprawl of low-slung casinos, the firework riot of neon signs along Fremont Street, where the doors never closed and it was always playtime. Helen Grayco singing at the Tropicana before

calling into the chuck wagon midnight buffet at the Flamingo.'

'Sounds swell, Doctor, and I'd love to see it myself some time.

But there's one thing the Vegas of '57 didn't have...'

'And that is?'

The reason we're here! Remember? The belated birthday present

you promised me? The pelvis that's about to be gyrating on that

stage! Elvis "The King" Presley!'

'That's not entirely true, Peri. I was there when Elvis made his

debut just down the road at the New Frontier. April 1956. He didn't exactly rattle the turnstiles in those days, but –'

'No, I mean the *real* Elvis. The jumpsuits. The belts. The

rhinestones. I still can't believe we're here. It's so exciting!' Her eyes shone with expectation.

A smile etched its way across the Doctor's face.

'You're really looking forward to this, aren't you?'

'He's the best, Doctor.'

'But why?' asked the Doctor.

'He's just...' Peri reached for the words, but couldn't find them. 'I don't know. The voice, the look, the moves. Every time I hear him I get goose bumps and a tingle down my spine. I love him,' she said

matter-of-factly.

'Well, you just can't help falling in love sometimes, Peri. And,

thanks to a friend who owns a time machine, you get to experience

him up close.'

Pen glanced over at the stage. ‘Talking about time, shouldn’t the show have started already?’

The Doctor fished into his waistcoat and pulled out a pocket watch. He flicked it open and frowned. ‘Yes, you’re right. Mr Presley is being a little on the tardy side. How odd. He never liked to keep his fans waiting.’

‘I’d wait for him forever,’ said Pen, draining her cocktail through a straw with a final slurp. She ignored the disapproving look from her companion. ‘Oops! Empty glass. Well, if Elvis is running late, there must be time to get the birthday girl another cocktail.’

The Doctor wasn’t listening. Instead he was leaning back in his

seat and peering curiously over to the corner of the stage where, through a crack in the curtain, he could see the animated and somewhat frantic arm movements of a stage manager.

‘Hello? Doctor?’

‘Hmm?’ The Doctor was pulled back from his thoughts as Pen waved a hand in front of his eyes.

‘Another drink? You did say my every wish was your command tonight.’

‘What? Oh, yes, of course, of course. How rude of me. Same again? What was it? A High Roller? I’ll just pop over to the bar and _’

‘Just ask one of the waitresses to bring it over.’

The Doctor shook his head and jumped to his feet. ‘No, no, I insist. Besides, I’m feeling a little peckish.’

‘Peckish? After that steak?’

‘Must be the excitement. Back in a jiff.’

The Doctor picked up Pen’s glass and before she could protest he was bounding away across the auditorium.

The Doctor never made it to the bar. Getting backstage was tricky but even the Hilton’s security guards were no trouble for a man who had once bluffed his way into Area 51. The guard standing at a door to the backstage area took one look at his flamboyant coat and immediately swallowed his story that he was an entertainer in a late-night revue who had merely mislaid his pass. After all, nobody would choose to walk around dressed like that. For once, the Doctor blended in. He wasn’t sure he was entirely comfortable with that.

The guard did seem rather distracted, and it was obvious to the Doctor that he had more pressing matters on his mind. He couldn’t make out everything he’d heard on the man’s walkie-talkie but it confirmed his suspicions. Elvis, it appeared, had left the building.

And so the Doctor found himself wandering through drab backstage corridors, avoiding stagehands and musicians who were desperately searching for their star turn. Nobody took any notice of him dodging nimbly from one corner to another, his colourful coat tails flapping. Nobody gave him a second glance as he slipped quietly behind a troupe of giggling, tottering showgirls before deftly jumping into a lift and pressing the button for the penthouse. Of course, things could never be simple, but when the lift stubbornly refused to take him to Elvis’s penthouse suite without a special key, the Doctor jabbed the button to close the doors, produced a screwdriver (non-sonic) from a pocket and jemmied open a control panel. Pausing to look into the mess of tangled wires for a second, he

set about hot-wiring the elevator.

96

Within minutes the doors opened directly onto the Hilton's most expensive and luxurious suite with a friendly 'ping'.

The Doctor's head emerged through the opening elevator doors. His alert eyes scanned the lobby. He stepped out carefully.

'Anyone home?' he called out, but there was no reply. He tried again. 'Room service!'

The only answer was the crackly gospel record playing on the hi-fi unit in one corner of the room, a massive wooden device that would have been ultra-modern in the early seventies. The Doctor walked over to the music centre, his spats sinking into the plush purple carpet, and gently pressed the mechanism that lifted the needle from the spinning LP.

There was a sudden crash from the next room. The Doctor's head snapped round. So, he wasn't alone. He quickly weighed up his options, and then, pursing his thin lips, decided to grab the bull by the horns. Whoever was next door, they would already know he was here.

He strode across the room purposefully, hand reaching for the door handle.

'Mr Presley? Is that you in there, sir? Are you –'

The Doctor yanked open the door to be greeted by a sharp hiss. He stepped back urgently but it was too late, as a cloud of foul-smelling green gas enveloped his head. The Doctor gagged as the

suite span and churned around him. He fell to his knees, coughing violently, and made out the shape of a small but stocky figure holding something bulky before crashing to the floor, unconscious.

‘You ain’t nothing but a hound dog...’

The Doctor groaned, consciousness returning with the subtlety of a sledgehammer assaulting his temples.

‘Scratching all the time...’

He almost wished he was still out cold. First, there was the stench, a thick, cloying hum of stale sweat that was so palpable it assaulted the back of his nose and throat.

‘You ain’t nothing but a hound dog.’

Then there was the singing.

‘Scratching all the time...’

A monotonous, sinus-shredding drone, like a blunt needle, was trying to pierce his eardrums.

‘Who ain’t never caught a rare bit and you ain’t a friend of mine.’

‘If you’re going to butcher a classic,’ the Doctor began, trying to gather the strength he needed to pull himself up from the cold metal floor, ‘you could at least get the words right.’

The Doctor managed to prise open his eyes, blinking in the bright

fluorescent lighting and trying to ignore the pain in the back of his head. The barrel of a formidable gun stared at him. His headache was already starting to clear.

‘Everyone’s a critic,’ came the rasped reply. The figure in front of him was stout, stumpy and ashen-faced. Flaky skin hung from heavy jowls and a soft, wet mouth, framed by a wispy,

unconvincing goatee, snarled to reveal uneven, amber teeth. Above the podgy, pockmarked nose perched a pair of wraparound black shades.

'You're awake then?' whined the creature, jabbing the gun nearer to the Doctor's face.

'Evidently. Your powers of perception are as keen as your karaoke skills.'

The creature pulled off the shades and a single, watery cyclopean eye stared down in disgust at the Doctor.

The Doctor stared back and with a groan, he pulled himself up so he was sitting at eye level with his diminutive kidnapper. Rubbing the back of his neck, he looked the alien in the ill-fitting silver spacesuit up and down. Like all Mongarians, his captor went barefoot, mainly so that their bunion, wart and verruca-encrusted feet could be soothed by their spaceships' damp air. 'I'm quite surprised to see a Mongarian so far from home. 20th-century Earth is a little out of the way for your lot, isn't it?'

'You know our race?'

'I've had some dealings with your people in the past, yes.'

'I knew it!' the Mongarian punched the air in triumph. 'I told them!'

'Knew what?' asked the Doctor. 'It may be the lingering effect of your stun gas but you've lost me.'

'You're another enthusiast, aren't you? You're from a rival society.'

The Doctor shook his head wearily. 'I have no idea what you're

talking about.'

'And they said I was wrong to transmat you here.' The Mongarian thrust at the Doctor with his oversized weapon. 'Get up. You're coming with me. This is gonna be brilliant!'

'If you say so.' Wincing, the Doctor drew himself up, trying to avoid the sharp bayonet bolted to the end of the Mongarian's gun that was being jabbed excitedly (and dangerously) in his general direction. As he was marched through the dank, uncomfortably humid corridors he took in his surroundings; grimy walls were plastered with dog-eared posters of famous faces from every corner of time and space. Cult-movie are rubbed shoulders with pin-ups ripped from the centrefolds of glossy magazines and, in every nook 98 and cranny, a virtual Aladdin's cave of merchandise was crammed – plastic models, badges, picture discs and concert programmes.

As the Doctor avoided being prodded along by the grinning Mongarian behind him, he was starting to have some very worrying thoughts about what he'd just stumbled upon.

Double doors heaved open with a piston clank and the Doctor was roughly shoved into the chamber beyond, the foul-smelling alien stepping after him. The heavy gun was still trained on the Time Lord, and the Doctor was under no illusion that the Mongarian knew how to use it.

'Where have you been?' whined a new and nasal voice. 'We're ready to get out of this backwater.'

The Doctor whirled round and quickly scanned the room. It was

as rank as the rest of the ship, but here was definitely the business end of the operation. Two more Mongarians – one so skinny it

looked as if a gentle breath would snap him in two, and the other a hulking brute – stood gawping at this colourful figure standing on their flight deck, jet-black wrap-around shades covering their single eyes. They had been working at stacks and banks of mismatched

machinery that took up the rear of the chamber. Beyond lay the

flight controls and the expansive forward windows were filled by

the gaudy yet simultaneously breathtaking vista of Las Vegas by

night.

The ship was hovering directly over the strip! Hadn't anyone

noticed? The Doctor shook his head. The revellers on the boulevard below probably thought it was part of a swanky new hotel. Despite

himself, the Doctor admired the chutzpah needed to pull off a stunt like that. Only in Vegas.

But this was not what had attracted the Doctor's attention and he

glared, narrow-eyed, at the sight that greeted him in the centre of the flight deck. A spiral of gnarled, moulded plastic flowed up from the floor, blossoming outwards to form a flower-like cradle.

Suspended within this structure, wires and electrodes snaking all

over his white-clad body, was the unconscious form of Elvis Aaron

Presley. The Doctor stood still, eyes piercingly focused on the

disturbing tableau.

'Sorry, Malarch,' the first Mongarian said to his skinny

companion, moving past the Doctor towards a tank of viscous

liquid. 'I was making sure this guy couldn't cause any trouble.' He started manipulating controls on the side of the tank and the

substance began to gloop quietly away to itself. The alien glanced at the Doctor and licked his lips. 'Get this he's another fan.'

The Doctor looked at the lines of wires hooked up to Elvis,

following them back to sockets at the base of the tank of liquid.

Malarch eagerly stepped up to the Doctor in a manner that demonstrated the concept of personal space was alien to the Mongarian.

‘Another fan of the King, eh?’ Malarch burbled close to the Doctor, a wave of hot and stale pepperoni-laced breath passing over his face in a cloying wave. ‘Thought you’d come and spy on us, huh?’ The Mongarian removed his shades and blinked monoptically with that single, bloodshot eye. ‘Try to steal our idea, huh?’ The Doctor returned the gaze levelly and Malarch said, ‘Ha! You’re a joke,’ before stomping back to the equipment bank.

The Doctor pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and coughed into it politely, nimbly stepping forward a couple of paces. ‘Steal your plan?’ he said indignantly, eyes darting rapidly over every piece of equipment, analysing, assessing. ‘Steal your plan?’ He was close enough to Elvis to see that he was unharmed and still breathing. In that moment, the Doctor reflected sadly, the King looked more restful and at peace than anybody had probably seen him in a long time.

‘It’s what we’d do,’ said the third giant Mongarian, flicking a switch. Power hummed around the flight deck.

‘Let me get this straight,’ the Doctor began, painfully aware of the gun still held in his original captor’s stubby hands as he began to pace the room like an energetic university professor. ‘You take a not-quite-top-of-the-range DNA splicer, wire it through a primitive molecular sequencing imager. Then you hook it up to a vat of

concentrated and potent organic nutrient before, and here's the clincher, hooking it up to the greatest rock-and-roll legend the universe has ever known.'

The Doctor came to a halt with a hand resting on the cradle where Elvis remained blissfully unconscious and regarded the three Mongarians with his most piercing gaze. Three sets of yellowing teeth grinned at him. 'To wit, you are planning to clone the king of rock and roll!'

'Great, isn't it?' said Malarch, clearly their leader.

The Doctor shifted his laser gaze imperceptibly to look directly at Malarch and spoke very quietly. 'No, it is not great. It is disgusting. It is illegal. And it is abhorrent.'

'It's illegal?' asked the third Mongarian, looking earnestly at his companions, his face suddenly even more pallid and sweaty. 'You didn't say it was illegal!'

The Doctor threw his arms wide. 'But why? Why are you doing this?'

'You know what, Heckran?' Malarch sneered, wiping his nose

with the back of his hand. 'You should have left this one where you found him.' He crossed his spindly arms across his pigeon chest.

'The reason we're doing this,' he drawled carefully, using a tone usually saved for infants or idiots, 'is because he's Elvis Presley. What other reason is there?'

'You'll have to do better than that,' said the Doctor acidly.

'Will I?' snorted Malarch, turning his back on their captive to

check on the tubes snaking over the sleeping singer's body. 'Will I really? And why exactly is that, Mr High and Mighty Fashion Victim? Who are you to tell me what to do on my own ship?'

The Doctor pulled himself up to his full height and towered over the skinny alien.

'I'll tell you who I am. I am known as the Doctor, and I am Lord President of the High Council of Time Lords of Gallifrey.'

There was an uncomfortable silence on the flight deck. Malarch blinked his single eye. 'Who?'

The Doctor opened his mouth to speak but stopped abruptly, suddenly thrown.

All three Mongarians burst into uncontrollable laughter. A tear ran down Heckran's nose and he slapped a hand against his thigh.

'Time Lords!' he shrieked. 'I love it!'

'Gallifrey!' Malarch joined him. 'That's a good one!'

'Where do you guys get this stuff from?' asked the third member of the bizarre group. 'You should write a book!'

The Doctor rolled his eyes. He had to finish this before somebody got hurt. 'It doesn't matter where I'm from,' he declared sharply, 'but I am ordering you to put your victim back in his hotel suite and return to the future where you belong, stopping only to hand in what I can only guess is a stolen time-drive. What you are attempting is very, very wrong. Just what are you planning to do with a cloned Elvis Presley anyway?'

Heckran raised his eyebrow. 'You were right, Malarch. He really is stupid. You think we'd do all this for one measly clone?'

‘Heckran!’ warned Malarch, but the squat Mongarian wasn’t listening, his ego bolstered by the size of his firearm.

‘Do go on,’ prompted the Doctor, seizing the opportunity for more information.

‘Oh no,’ continued Heckran, relishing the moment, ‘we’ve been doing this for months. And all our hard work is about to pay off.’

Before the leader of the Mongarian pack could stop him, Heckran reached down and flipped a switch. With electronic whines, panels in the walls began rising into the ceiling to reveal a series of oversized glass tubes. Suspended in each of the cabinets were perfect replicas of Elvis Presley, each from a different era of his 101 personal timeline.

‘That’s torn it, Heckran. We’ll have to wipe his memory now he’s seen this lot. Whether he’s one of these Time Lords or not, it’s obvious he’s not from the here and now. We can’t have him running back to the future after seeing all this.’

‘Sorry. I just wanted to see the look on his face.’

The look on the Doctor’s face was one of pure horror.

‘I don’t believe it. You can’t have!’

A smile spread over Malarch’s face. Despite his anger with Heckran, he couldn’t suppress the pride he took in his work.

‘You look shocked, Doctor. You shouldn’t be. I take my trade very seriously. They’re all here. The classics. Gold Lamé Elvis, Rockabilly Elvis, GI Elvis, Comeback Special Elvis. We’ve even got a Fat Elvis with burger accessory for the completist market. And

now,' he burbled excitedly, indicating the supine form in the cradle, 'we've got Seventies Vegas Elvis to complete the set. It's perfect.'

The Doctor was as near to speechless as this incarnation would ever get.

'Perfect? How can you think this is perfect?' he finally said. 'What have you three been up to?'

'This wasn't easy you know,' Malarch continued, waving his hands to take in the banks of equipment 'Nipping back and forth through Elvis's timeline, abducting him, creating a master copy of each of his eras and then wiping his memory before popping him back. I tell you what it took: dedication and planning.'

'Master copies?' the Doctor repeated. 'You plan to duplicate more?'

'Of course. Why go to all this trouble otherwise? Do you know how much these pelvis-wiggling clones are going to be worth?'

'Worth!' said the Doctor, the penny dropping. 'This is all about money?'

'No,' said Malarch. 'Well, okay, the cash will help, but mainly it's a matter of pride. We used to be the best, you see? Oh yeah, everyone knew that our convention table was the one you made a bee-line for.'

'The one with the best stuff,' Heckran added.

'The rarest merchandise.' rumbled the third hulking Mongarian.

The Doctor looked confused. 'You're some sort of, what? Traders?'

Malarch produced a card and handed it proudly to the Doctor.

The Doctor read, '"Malarch's Mega-Merchandise Emporium".' He breathed out in exasperation. 'I don't believe this.'

'We were the best,' snapped Malarch, 'had been for years. And then they came.'

'They?'

'A pair of stinking Slarvians.' Heckran picked up the tale of woe. 'Never been seen on the circuit before, but you wouldn't believe the quality of the merchandise.'

'Genuine reproduction autographs,' the third Mongarian murmured, misty-eyed. 'You name it, they had it. "Colonel" Tom Parker. Priscilla. Lisa Marie.'

'We couldn't compete,' Malarch hissed. 'Every convention they were there, cleaning up.'

The Doctor was slack-jawed in amazement. 'The three of you are traders on some sort of convention circuit, flogging knock-off Elvis merchandise and now you're planning to flog off the man himself?'

'When we get back to King-Con 2567, those Slarvians will be laughing on the other side of their shells. Who'll want their scummy repro-autographs when we're offering the real deal? Cloned Kings who can sign anything you want at the drop of your blue suede shoes. And, for the right price, why not take home your very own Elvis? Have the genuine article sing for you at home every night'

The Doctor glared at Malarch. 'It's obscene.'

'It's business, as is this. Goorg,' he said, turning to the third alien, 'chuck this clown out of an airlock.' The gloop of liquid in the tank

bubbled and heaved, and something was starting to form within its murky depths. ‘This Elvis is almost done and we need to get him back before anyone notices he’s gone.’

With a grunt of acknowledgement, Goorg lurched towards the Doctor. Huge plate-like hands grabbed the Doctor’s arms and began dragging him towards the doors. The Time Lord struggled against the brutish strength. ‘Malarch!’ he called out. ‘Listen to me!’ The alien turned from his console. ‘Didn’t anyone ever tell you that home copying was killing music? Time for a little less conversation, and a little more action instead!’

The Doctor lifted up a leg and slammed his shoe down on Goorg’s exposed hairy foot. Ignoring the bilious sensation of bunions crunching beneath his heel, the Doctor twisted athletically from Goorg’s grip and, grabbing his slab-like arm, heaved him round in an arc. Letting go, the Doctor watched as Goorg span, rather gracefully he thought, into Heckran, who squealed in shock, flapping his arms wildly as his bulky, oversized gun sailed through the air straight into the arms of the Doctor. In one fluid movement the Doctor cocked the weapon and aimed it at the babbling Malarch who suddenly wasn’t looking so confident

‘Now that I have your attention,’ the Doctor began before swinging the gun away from the terrified Mongarian towards the wall nearest him. The bayonet was pointing directly at a particularly nasty gaudy statuette of Elvis that was perched on a shelf above one

of the cloning chambers. ‘If anyone moves, the tat gets it!’

Malarch wrung his hands in panic. ‘No! That’s a genuine 1977 Sunrise Mould Company ceramic bust. Only three and a half

million made. It's priceless.'

'Then I suggest you listen to me. Actually, thinking about it, it's not me you need to listen to at all.' The Doctor lowered the gun.

'Tell me, Malarch, in all of this, as you three have nipped about in Elvis's timeline, have you ever bothered to stop and hear him sing?'

Malarch's face was a blank. 'Sing?'

'Yes, sing! It's what Elvis was best at. Yes, he was an actor. Yes, he was an icon. But none of that would have happened without his voice. You have all this technology at your disposal and you've never caught a gig?'

'We haven't had time,' admitted Heckran. 'We've had all the merchandise to collect.'

'I'm assuming that you do actually own some of Elvis's recordings?'

'Of course,' said Malarch, looking hurt that his fan credentials were being called into doubt. 'The ship's computer has the entire back catalogue archived, every album, B-side and bootleg.'

'Marvellous!' The Doctor strode across the flight deck to the controls. 'Computer?' he called out.

'The computer only answers to me,' Malarch snapped.

'Well, tell the computer to play track twelve on the 1997 CD re-release of *Jailhouse Rock*.'

'Why should I take orders from you?'

'Very well, one atomised bust coming up.' The Doctor raised the gun and jabbed it at the tasteless statuette.

'All right! All right!' Malarch screamed. 'Computer, you heard

the man! Play it!'

There was an electronic buzz as the computer searched through

its files and then the first bars of *Love Me Tender* filled the musty air of the flight deck.

The three Mongarians let the music wash over them. All the time,

the Doctor, his colourful form framed in the forward windows by

the equally colourful vista of Las Vegas by night, watched the

unconscious face of the man hooked up to the DNA splicer.

'Listen to that voice. Really listen to it. That unique, once-in-a-lifetime voice.' Three eyes stared unblinkingly at the Doctor while Elvis crooned. 'That voice could change a universe, dancing

through time forever more for people to listen to. Don't you see

what it means? Down there,' the Doctor breathed, throwing his

arms wide to indicate the city framed behind him in the window,

'where some of the greats have created magic twice-nightly. There

are already Elvis impersonators plying their trade, just a few short years before that man is tragically found dead. But, right now, he is a genuine, living legend. There will be many more impersonators to come, each of them trying to touch the magic that should be

performing on the stage of the Vegas Hilton right now. Not one will even come close.

'No one can duplicate that talent. Hearing Elvis sing *Love Me*

Tender, even on crackly vinyl, is the stuff of legend. It's like hearing Mozart perform *Piano Concerto No. 24 in C Minor*, Sinatra crooning *One For My Baby*, or Girls Aloud singing *Love Machine*.

The moments when the universe gets it right are few and far

between, but it when it does,' the Doctor whistled, 'it really gets it right. To do what you're doing, to reduce perfection to a range of

walking, talking action figures, is sickening.

‘To take Elvis Presley, to clone him and copy him for all to have, waters down the very thing that makes him brilliant and unknowable. You’re taking something unique and making it mundane!’

The Doctor paraded in front of the cloning chambers and the many forms of Elvis Presley over the years. ‘Your clones may look like Elvis, they may even sound like him, but they will never be him. They will always be flawed, imperfect copies, worthless to anyone who truly appreciates what made the King so special.’

All the time Elvis sang on in the background, and the Doctor couldn’t be sure, but he thought he could see a tear forming in Malarch’s single eye. ‘If you are the fans you claim to be, surely the three of you will see that this menagerie of fakes is an insult to anyone who’s ever listened to that voice and felt their heart lifted. That man has a few years left to him and an eternity of being immortalised in music.’

The song was coming to an end, the final notes hanging hauntingly in the air.

‘I’m going to lower the gun now and leave the decision up to you. Are you going to carry on with your scheme and create copies to make a quick buck, or are you going to return Elvis to his rightful place in history, reduce these clones to the nutrient soup they were before you moulded them and join me in experiencing the wonder that is a Las Vegas Elvis Presley concert?’

The gun fizzed and clicked as the Doctor powered it down.

‘Well then, my friends, what’s your decision? It’s now or never.’

‘Mr Presley? Wakey-wakey!’

The Doctor, with as much reverence as possible under the circumstances, gently patted the face of arguably history’s greatest

rock-and-roll performer. He lay, spark out, on the bed back in his suite. He noted with a private smile that the King had started snoring. ‘Rise and shine, Mr Presley.’ The Doctor beamed as Elvis groaned gently and his eyes flickered open. ‘Who the heck are you?’ he mumbled in that familiar drawl, and his face creased in confusion as he looked down to see he was lying fully clothed on his bed.

The Doctor stepped back to give him some room. ‘I am known as the Doctor,’ he said with dramatic flourish and handed Presley a glass of water from the bedside table. ‘Here, drink this. You’ll no doubt be dehydrated. You just had a little nap.’

Elvis sat up and took the glass.

‘A doctor?’ he said, taking a big gulp of water. ‘I don’t need no doctors, I’m fightin’ fit, ready to go.’

‘I’m sure you are, Mr Presley. No arguments from me.’

‘I gotta say, though,’ continued Elvis, ‘I have been havin’ these weird kinda dreams.’

‘Oh yes?’ queried the Doctor, putting on his best bedside manner. ‘What dreams would those be?’

‘I can’t rightly say, but there’s these freaky fellas. And they all have this one big old eye, right,’ he gestured to the middle of his forehead, ‘here.’ He shivered and took another gulp of water.

‘I wouldn’t worry about those, Mr Presley. Just bad dreams and

I'm sure they'll pass.' The Doctor fished his fob watch from a waistcoat pocket and flicked it open. 'And I believe you are a little late for your first show of the night.'

Elvis jumped to his feet, suddenly full of energy. 'What? Oh man, the audience is gonna be –'

'I think your audience is more than willing to let the King be a few minutes late for a show.'

'I'm never late.'

'I'm sure this once it will be all right.' The Doctor turned to the door and made to leave.

'Hey,' Elvis called to him. 'Nice threads.'

The Doctor looked down at his colourful attire. 'Thank you very much. Not many people recognise style when they see it. You are a man of rare taste and discernment, Mr Presley.'

'Hey, I still don't get who you really are,' Elvis added as the Doctor was about to leave.

The Doctor smiled. 'Oh, I'm just a fan. Have a good show.'

Elvis nodded and the Doctor opened the door, but stopped on the threshold. 'Before I go,' he said, delving into a pocket. 'There is one thing you could do for me...'

* * *

106

The Doctor moved across the auditorium, threading his way nimbly through the network of tables with a volley of charming apologies to those already seated as he passed. The auditorium was large, but the Doctor was aware of an almost electric heat, like a static charge

waiting to be earthed, rippling through the audience. It was that thrill of human expectation and overwhelming excitement, and it needed an outlet. The Doctor smiled. If he was right, the audience was about to find that outlet.

'Where have you been?' demanded Peri as the Doctor plonked his large frame in the chair and a cocktail on the table in front of her.

'Been?' The Doctor looked over at his companion with that practised look of serene innocence that, as always, singularly failed to convince her. 'Just been, ah, outside.'

'Doctor.' A warning note crept into Pen's voice and her eyes narrowed, although she couldn't quite hide the smile behind her good-natured admonishment. 'What have you been up to?'

The Doctor looked affronted. 'You have a very suspicious mind, Peri.'

Peri looked around the auditorium. 'You know I love Elvis, but King or not, he'd better hurry up and get out here. This lot look like they could get ugly.'

'Oh, I don't think they'll have too long to wait. I'd say the man himself should be on stage any second now.'

On cue, the house lights dimmed and around the two time travellers the sense of expectation heightened even further.

'By the way,' the Doctor leant over and whispered to Pen in the darkness. 'I got you a present. Happy birthday, Peri.' He placed something on the table in front of her, grinning impishly. Before she could ask him what it was, a single spotlight sliced down from somewhere high on the ceiling, illuminating a lone figure in the

centre of the stage.

Elvis Presley stood resplendent, his lean frame clad in a simple white two-piece, studded with rhinestones across the collar. The auditorium erupted with applause, and Peri joined in, jumping to her feet.

'I can't believe I'm seeing this!' she shouted to the Doctor. 'He looks amazing! It's just magic,' she breathed.

'It certainly is,' agreed the Doctor, glancing over to the three mismatched figures sitting a few tables away, black wraparound shades covering their eyes. They were whooping and whistling along with the rest of the audience.

Instead of breaking into song, as the audience expected, the figure on stage waited patiently for the applause to die down. He was the 107 King. He could wait all night.

Expectant silence settled over the room once more.

Elvis lifted a microphone to his lips. 'Ladies and gentleman,' he began, 'before tonight's performance, I just wanna say a few words.

I kinda think somethin' happened to me tonight. I don't know what, I don't know how, and if I think about it, I may just damn near go crazy.'

Peri had picked up the item left on the table for her by the Doctor.

It was an autograph book.

'But somewhere out there tonight is a gentleman who I get the feeling might have saved my life.'

Peri opened the book and read the first page. Her eyes widened and she looked down at the Doctor in amazement, before gazing in

awe at Elvis standing on stage, her mouth hanging open.

'Doctor, if you're out there, sir, I've just got one thing to say...

Thank you very much.'

As the band struck up the first chords of *See See Rider*, the Doctor rose to his feet and stood, placing an arm affectionately

round Peri's shoulders.

'No, Mr Presley,' he said quietly to himself, grinning, 'thank you very much.'

Have You Tried Turning It Off

And Then Back On Again?

John Callaghan

An adventure of the Seventh Doctor, with Mel

In the beginning was the alarm.

With a groan, the Creator pawed at the bedside clock to switch it

off and wondered, as he did every morning, why he had made dawn

so damn early.

Blearily leaving his bed, he shuffled to the bathroom. Relieving

himself, he stared at his reflection in the mirror above the toilet.

Facing oneself, he thought, was never a good start to the day, but it did mean that the day was likely to get better. And, just like every day, he pondered whether to trim his long, snowy beard – a white

hair for every worry.

His lined reflection scowled as he heard the chime of the first of the day's many e-mails arriving. It's all right for you, thought the Creator, you get to stay in the mirror all day. Yet his reflection seemed wrinkled and worried too.

After washing his hands, the Creator moved to his office, sat at

his desk and lit his first guilty cigarette of the day. He had been meaning to give up the disgusting habit since, well, forever. Leafing through the yellow mound of sticky notes addressed to him, he saw

the usual messages:

‘Hail to you, Creator of All. The crops are failing in the Northern Province. We’ll love you forever if you sort it out.’

‘The constant rain in the South is becoming a chore, old man.

Could you do your shazam on it? Thanks! I owe you one!’

‘My acne’s still not cleared up and I’m going out with Ruby– you

know, the tall one from the front desk – on Friday. Could you put

me on top of the stack, please? Bless you!’

He put each in his to-do pile and hoped he wouldn’t have very

many requests that directly contradicted others. Just like he hoped every day. Sipping coffee from his ‘#1 Deity!’ mug (the enamel was cracking a little – wasn’t he due a replacement?) he looked around his office. The spherical rock chamber should have seemed

expansive: after all, it did form the core of the planet. But the

Creator could swear it was shrinking. Why, then, did the vast banks of instruments, screens and flickering lights, each one a call to a task, seem that much more numerous and onerous?

Maybe I should clear away some of the piles of clutter he

thought, and then dismissed it as work-avoidance. With a yawn so

weary it could have been a sigh, he turned his attention to the

displays. Each showed the view from one of the Creator’s cloud-

mounted microscopic cameras, invariably a peaceful and sunny

scene with a merry crowd of people. His people.

His flock.

Stove Hendricks awoke to the thud of a woollen robe being thrown onto his bed. A tidy, middle-aged woman in a similar garment stood above him, holding a tray of breakfast and wearing a tight smile.

‘Shake a leg, dear. We’ve only twenty minutes to get to the ceremony.’ Stove’s feet reluctantly found the bedroom floor and he stood.

‘No one will mind if we’re late, mother,’ he croaked. ‘In fact, we’re always first.’ He shoved the gold-coloured gown into the canvas satchel by his bed. Although it had been freshly washed and ironed, he wondered when it had become so tatty.

‘We won’t beat Mrs Prendergast this morning, that’s for sure.’

A smiling bald man poked his head around the door behind her, rolled his eyes and swiftly withdrew.

Mrs Hendricks didn’t notice her husband’s intrusion and squinted at her son. ‘It’s too late for you to shave, I suppose?’

Stove rubbed the stubble on his chin. ‘Isn’t the Creator supposed to have a beard? Are we not created in his image?’ He smiled and kissed his mother’s forehead. ‘Don’t worry, Mother, 1 won’t embarrass you at the service today. I’m too tired, for one thing.’

And so the Hendricks, Mother, Father and Stove, left their humble home and walked across the well-kept square with its smooth stone paving and low hedges. They passed the lido with its laughing swimmers in bright costumes enjoying the crisp sunshine. Slave was jealous of the fun the people he passed seemed to be having, but he said nothing. He had promised not to embarrass Mother, after all. He sighed. They were only moments from the

Committee of Worship. He hoped no one would see him. Even thinking about the social nightmare brought a blush to his cheeks. Oh, why did his family have to be so devout? It wasn't as if the Creator didn't actually exist, was it?

A loud splash from a speaker made the Creator start. He looked up to see a screen where people were swimming, but they were all

sideways! That couldn't be right! It took a moment for the Creator to right himself from where he had dozed off on a control panel. As he gently plucked paper clips from his face and staples from his beard, he muttered a joke about being on top of his work. No one was listening, of course.

The Creator focused on checking through his to-do list while the cheerful babble from the sporty crowd in the pool continued. Heavy rain was scheduled for later but he noticed that none of the swimmers had requested an uninterrupted day. He turned his attention to the flooding to come in the Western Province. It had to be enough to control the rat problem people had reported but not enough to interfere with Mr Sotheby's holiday plans.

He never noticed every one of the swimmers leave the pool, towel off and walk to Jubilee Park.

Bork Ollerenshaw was struck by how well his new bright-red bike showed off his muscled and tanned legs as he approached the starting line. This was probably the only time of the year he actually felt as confident, fit and attractive as most people seemed to think he was. He considered his prospects in the coming race: his blond hair was short to lessen drag; his angled chin was aerodynamic

enough as long as he kept his mouth shut, which came easily to him; and there was no one more familiar with the route as he had cycled the length of the Jubilee Park every day since coming a disappointing second in the race last year.

He surveyed the opposition. Many were well-toned types like himself but their faces, currently laughing, would become blank masks once the race began. He was certain he could never look as fierce.

He envied the cavalier spirit of those who took the race less than seriously, doing the course on skateboards, unicycles and such things as inflatable bouncing balls. His friend Rudl had promised she'd come along in a two-person giant ocelot costume – and there she was! She had furry legs, clearly the back of the ocelot, and was putting on a pair of chunky, bright orange roller-skates. She saw Bork and waved gleefully, her rosy face beaming.

Bork wondered what her brain would taste like.

It was always sunny on race day, so she was going to be very warm at the end of the course. Maybe he could be ready for Rudl with a cool drink after she passed the finishing line. He smiled and gave a shy wave in return. Then Keer caught his eye. Last year's winner, and as perfect a physical specimen as Bork could imagine. Surely he was indeed crafted in the image of the Creator? Keer paused from his warm-up exercises to give Bork a friendly bow. He

probably had a more savoury brain than Audi's. Then Bork noticed Keer had a rash on his leg. Might it impair his performance? Maybe

this year Bork had a chance?

He loved the annual race. Jubilee Park was beautifully

landscaped, with sculpted topiary lining the smooth grey path, and a spectrum of blooms behind the happy faces of the hundreds of

families and friends who came to watch. With only a few minutes to go, Bork took his position, idly scratching a sudden itch on the back of a leg.

Slove was pleased the Committee of Worship building, being old-

fashioned and irregularly maintained, was shielded from the sight of the town's main square. People he knew might otherwise have

realised he spent three hours a week dutifully attending the

Presentation rituals.

Once at the heavy door of the large wooden hall, Stove shrugged

into his robe. The gesture struck him as appropriate – putting on the gown was like admitting to the cosmos that one was resigned to

having no satisfactory answers or explanations.

Then Mrs Hendricks pushed open the door with as much

reverence as she could muster while trying to hurry enough to beat the redoubtable Mrs Prendergast.

'Hello, dears,' came a fluting voice from inside. Was it also a

little smug? With a roll of her eyes, a purse of her lips and then a glare at the son who had made her late, Mrs Hendricks led her

family inside.

Mrs Prendergast was using her large stature to set lights in the

high sconces which illuminated the yellowing frescoes on each of

the four walls. The hall had room for two hundred people but,

today, was occupied by just the four of them. Again it somehow

seemed appropriate, as if the place should be empty and echoing.

The woman with the mauve hairdo opened her arms in welcome.

‘Now we’re all finally here,’ she began with a small smile, ‘we can begin the ceremony.’

Mrs Hendricks frowned. ‘Where are the Jensons?’

‘Oh, they’re watching the race. *We* would much rather be here.’

Mr Hendricks and his son exchanged glances.

The race! The Creator had completely forgotten all about it! He tore through reams of paperwork and scanned over a bank of screens as

he tried to remember whether he’d rescheduled the rain for that

province. No, the reminder had been buried under a hill of requests for specific topics for forthcoming exams. Oops.

* * *

112

‘Let us begin by inhaling the sacred incense,’ said Mrs Prendergast.

‘Mr Jenson dropped around a new batch he’d brewed up in his shed

this week. It’s mint-scented.’

As she dragged the brazier from a cupboard, Mr Hendricks

groaned. ‘Couldn’t we do that bit at the end, Mrs P? It doesn’t

matter if he’s scented the stuff, it still stinks of fish. And you know it plays havoc with my bronchioles.’

‘Oh, the smoke is so nice for atmosphere, dear!’

But Mr Jenson was known among the group for his particularly

acrid concoctions, and it was quickly decided to postpone the thick, choking fumes, no matter how sacred they might be. Slove was sure

he wasn’t the only one who was glad of this. Oh, why did he find

the ceremony so trying, this part especially so? Why did it all have to be so tedious? Would the Creator give a fig for his people’s

worship?

Mr Hendricks pointed out the lack of fog meant the small group

could see the frescoes more clearly. Which still wasn't very clearly, he was ready to admit. The next order of business was to

contemplate the significance of the illustrations and, due to many years of incense build-up, most of the contemplation was

guesswork. After ten minutes of 'And here's that nice Mr Creator

making a beast of the field' and 'Are you sure? It does rather look like a bookcase, don't you think?', Slove decided he could take no more while remaining responsible for his actions.

As he began to sidle towards the door, his mother caught his

movement. 'If you must leave as so soon, Slove, my dear, could you make sure you sign the Creator's card? Oh, and could you post it for us?' She dug out a Sacred Envelope from a cupboard, along with a

Sacred Pen.

Slove tried not to roll his eyes and took a look at this latest

present for the Creator. It was a large colourful card with a smiling cloud looking benevolently over a crowd of people, drawn in a

childish style by young Cindy Jenson. The inscription read, 'You

Don't Have To Be The Creator To Work Here, But It Helps!'

He chewed the end of the Sacred Pen and contemplated his

message. A sense of mischief made him write, 'Ars est celare

artem'. Then it struck him that he was being pompous, so he turned each A into a smiley face.

He tucked the Sacred Envelope into his satchel, shucked off his

robe and departed into the sunshine.

The Creator surveyed the happy faces of the spectators lining the

suburban route of the bicycle race. He usually enjoyed the spectacle

and would chortle at the range of vehicles used but there was no

chance to relax today. He could see the clouds gathering, blithely ignored by the hundreds of people in the crowd in their colourful

summer garb who had complete faith that the day would be clear.

And when it turned out not to be, who else would they blame?

A few quick sums on the back of an envelope showed him that

only the very end of the contest would be rained upon. With luck,

the public would think it was his sense of drama rather than him

punishing them for something. He could do without the countless

‘I-didn’t-do-anything-to-deserve-that’ memos clogging his in-box.

With a quiet sigh, the Creator returned to his checklist. As he

attended the many switches, potentiometers and levers, the blinking lights faded one by one. Each one signalled a task that needed

addressing and, as each one dimmed, two others would replace it.

A faint and repetitive chime from the central equipment bank

alerted him to yet another issue that required his attention. The

sound was almost polite yet equally insistent. What now? The

gentle tolling was replaced by a horrendous scraping, like a piano being forced to confess.

The Creator turned to the immense bank of screens and tried to

locate the source of the new problem. Each image had a river of text flowing up the left-hand side, and each had an angry flashing red

light indicating that it needed his urgent attention. He soon worked out what this new irregularity was. One screen was showing a dark

blue wardrobe fading into existence.

The Creator scowled, slapped his head and swore. The physics

engine couldn't have broken down again! It had taken days to fix last time! Even then, he had craftily manufactured an eclipse to keep the shrinking trees hidden while he hastily replaced them. What a frenetic six minutes that had been! It seemed unusual and exhilarating at the time yet he seemed to have been that busy increasingly frequently over the last few months.

He shook a stray paperclip out of his white mane. Ah well, back to the wardrobe. His thick eyebrows lifted as the door opened and a woman and a man emerged. Aha, a teleport capsule! The Creator felt a moment's pride. He ran a tidy enough planet. Why wouldn't people want to visit? Maybe they'd come to see the bike race.

The woman was slim and wore a jumpsuit patterned with pink polka dots. Perhaps she was self-conscious about her masses of red curls and sought to distract from them. Ah, but the eye of the Creator saw all. When his cameras were working properly, anyway.

The new male arrival had a compact frame and, with his pale jacket and hat, had an altogether more beige aspect.

'We certainly took our time arriving, Doctor,' she said, in a tone of teasing reproach. The man simply scowled. It must be the day for 114 it. He used the handle of the umbrella he carried to swing one foot slowly around.

They took in the yellow-grey of the walkways and low buildings, with the paved paths lined by knee-high greenery. 'It's a bit Solihull, isn't it?' the woman said. The Creator didn't know whether to be insulted or not.

'Hmm,' said the man in a low purr. Having decided on a direction, he released his foot and began walking.

Slove had difficulty posting the card into the prayer box, as it was crammed with memos and yellow Pray-It NotesTM. Requests for good results in the race, no doubt. Wandering towards the sauntering crowd in their pastel summer clothes, he saw they were all heading for the park and the bike race. Slove could hear the excited burble of those already there. The babble suddenly subsided into whispering and then almost-silent expectation. The race was about to begin!

There was the distant blast of the starting klaxon and a great cheer filled the air. Whistling, he jogged along to watch the race and add his own voice.

Bork liked to pretend the cheering and applause of the crowd was the sound of a rocket going off, propelling him forward. The gleeful faces became a blur to him as the group of cyclists suddenly advanced. He was heartened to see how out of shape many of the other racers were. Too much training time spent laughing and relaxing, perhaps. Even so, he was surprised to see how poor the skin condition was on so many of his competitors. It seemed that almost every rider had a rash, acne or an irritation of some kind. And they were slow – and getting slower, much slower.

Such was his concentration that the race began to seem like a dream, as he flew past more of the lagging figures, falling to either side of him like colourful fragments of a torn painting. Clowns, ocelots, a tuba player on a skateboard, they seemed to have ground to a stop while he pumped his legs harder and faster.

Bork could feel his muscles tightening but he gripped the handlebars and forced himself onward. Now the shapes flowing past

him were the serious contenders, with their skin-tight leotards and rigid faces. He felt like he was gliding through a forest of people as they whizzed by on either side of him. His legs were stiffening

badly now and the itching was becoming distracting. He was nearly

at the front! Focus!

A sudden cramp in his legs made him lose all concentration and

Bork reached a hand down to quickly massage the muscles. His

fingers met a scaly roughness. He looked away from the road and

the crowd, not feeling anything as he saw his own coarsened leg. As if in sympathy, the crowd's cheers had turned to gasps. He rubbed

his fingers against the usually taut skin of his calf. It was flaking off like bark! What was happening to him?

Slove had followed the crowd for a short while when he realised

something was very wrong. The merry whooping had turned to

silence and then the unfamiliar sound of screaming. The noises

were disturbing and wrong, like animal cries. People's wails were

like sirens signalling fear. He saw a panicked crowd, faces made

alien to him as they contorted in fright. He froze as dozens of

terrified spectators ran past. Children who didn't recognise the

danger were sobbing at being so urgently dragged away from the

park by their parents.

Slove had to know what was causing this. A queasy feeling of

apprehension was mixed with fascination. Dormant adrenal glands

began to work overtime.

He moved forward, against the tide of people, certain that he was

walking towards trouble, but he had to see it for himself.

Some of the crowd were not running now, but shambling. Their faces were fixed in the same twisted look of fear. Their skin was a sickening blue and scarred with inflammations. These people weren't screaming but croaking and groaning. He could see slack lips flapping together over open mouths. They were trying to speak.

He realised there were hundreds of these diseased people advancing towards him. Their progress was slow but relentless. As one, they raised their arms to shoulder height and their voices became a low moan. The escaping air from their mouths finally began to catch the edges of their loose lips and a word formed, emitted from each throat in unison.

'Brains... Brains...'

Slove felt cold and sickened as the pale crowd advanced.

'Brains,' said a young woman in a flowered frock, her reddened eyes fixed on him.

'Brains,' said a grey-haired man with a baby on his shoulders.

'Bra-buh,' said the baby, its arms outstretched. Horribly, the corners of its mouth began to rise in a sinister smile.

Every distorted face lost its look of fear, to be replaced by a leer.

Were they walking faster, too?

The only sensation Bork felt now was like a swarm of insects inside his skull. Whatever had occupied his mind could somehow smell the brains filling the heads of those around him, then feed from

them, then seed itself.

He knew fear tasted the best. It was sweet and rich. Its aroma steamed out of the noses, mouths and eyes of the people beside him. The uninfected were running but the disease would catch them quickly enough. Bork could feel it pour out of his head and gush to surround them, to invade them. As he watched their faces freeze, their screams fade and the same desire overwhelm them, he could feel it fountain back inside him to fill his skull once more.

The Creator's jaw was slack and his eyes were staring. His mouth opened and closed repeatedly as he tried to form words. He slowly raised his hands, then clutched the hair on the side of his head and wailed a mournful moan.

'What?'

He abruptly burst into action. What was happening? The screens weren't malfunctioning – for a change. His flock really were that hideous colour! What the deuce was this talk of brains? They'd never been interested in brains before!

Think. Come on! *Think!*

The Creator looked from screen to screen at the lurching horde. His panic at seeing the fearful faces of those still fleeing and crying was heightened by the sight of each figure suddenly stiffening and turning blue, then join the marching multitude. The Creator's mind scrabbled about for any idea as to what might have happened.

He frantically pulled open drawer after drawer of his filing cabinets, throwing folders, books and charts over his head. The screams and yells from the loudspeakers became an incessant groaning, growing ever louder. Insistent sirens joined lights

indicating unattended alarms. The Creator's attention was still being called to routine tasks. Within a minute there was a cacophony of chirps, bells and bleeps like a mocking chorus to the choir of malignant droning from his infected people.

In the last drawer his shaking fingers snatched out the thick and battered book he'd been searching for: *Care Of Your Flock*. With his open palm he shuffled through the pages. 'Start-Up', 'Maintenance', 'Keeping Your Person Happy'. He raced to the back of the book, 'Troubleshooting'. He urgently scanned through the chapters but there was nothing there to help him. He hurled the book against the rock wall.

Perhaps it was some kind of airborne spore? Maybe he could bring the rain forward and impede the spread of the infection? He anxiously checked the programming he had set earlier. He had done his job too well: it wouldn't rain for another hour.

He pounded at his head and sank to his knees. His flock had taken

it for granted that he would protect them and he had failed them.

Wait! What about the aliens?

Slove felt himself being pulled backwards firmly.

'Stop staring and run!'

He was hurriedly turned about and saw that the voice came from an urgent young woman who pulled him by his hand towards the fleeing families, away from the lurching blue ghouls. In a second he was running too.

Mrs Prendergast and Mrs Hendricks broke off their gentle

disagreement about the hall's murals. The screams and cries had reached the Committee building. At first, there was some tutting about how raucous it was. Then the celebrants fell silent and stared at each other in apprehension as it became clear they were hearing the unfamiliar wails of panic.

The door of the Committee Hall slammed open and Slove fell into the chamber, followed by an athletic woman and a small man. They quickly shifted a dusty pew to block the door. Then the man turned and raised his hat. 'Good afternoon,' he said. 'I'm the Doctor.'

'And I'm Mel.'

After stunned yet polite introductions, six astonished faces peered out from a high window while Slove explained what he had seen.

The streets were teeming with countless blue-faced people, shreds of their former happiness visible only by their cheery summer clothes. Some staggered from foot to foot. Some jolted forward on skateboards, arms extended. The monstrous advance was sluggish but never stopped. Many teetered on bicycles, occasionally falling to one side as their pedalling slowed. A few fleeing faces were unaffected and terrified but there was no escape. A giant pantomime ocelot, its front and back limbs nightmarishly uncoordinated, bore down on a young, screaming girl. Within seconds, the small child's eyes had rolled upwards into her head and her skin turned blue.

'It's the slow bicycle race from Hell!' said Mel.

With a sob, Mrs Prendergast turned back into the room. 'Why? Why? What have we done to deserve this?'

Mr Hendricks took a deep breath. 'They can't get in, can they?'

Mrs Prendergast frowned. 'There looks like no stopping it. The

cause is the Creator. Everything is caused by the Creator.'

Mel went to Slove's side. 'So why wasn't Slove affected? Why haven't you been?'

'We congratulate the Creator in this building,' explained Mrs Hendricks. 'Maybe he's spared us because we send him presents

from time to time.' She stared at the floor and shook her head. Her voice was level. 'Everyone has always had such confidence in him and they take him for granted. Coming here seemed the only way to convince myself he's behind everything.'

Softly, Mr Hendricks said, 'I mainly come here for the cake afterwards.'

Slove reached for his mother. 'You can't think you're being punished?'

Mel clapped her hands to silence the self-pity. 'So, what's caused this and how do we stop it?'

The Doctor scratched at the wall with a thumbnail. 'The people outside have been affected by the Benoride Spread. It's a semi-intelligent alien fungus which controls the nervous system of its prey,' he said. 'I came to this planet to stop it.' He gave an apologetic smile. 'I was too late.'

Slove tilted his head. 'You're off-worlders?'

Mel nodded. 'We've dealt with this kind of thing before. It's all the running that keeps me fit.'

Mrs Prendergast pulled herself together. 'If you're looking for

explanations, the Creator is an absolute dear and looks after us very well.'

'But it doesn't explain anything, Mrs P,' said Slove. 'Brains, by the way.'

Mr Hendricks frowned, deep in thought.

Mrs Prendergast glared at Slove. 'Some things don't need an explanation. Why does it never, ever rain on Race Day? The Creator, you see.'

'Actually,' said the Doctor gently, 'that could be caused by a stable orbit, an inland sea and mountains creating a weather shadow.'

Mrs Prendergast gave him a withering look. 'I can explain everything simply, Doctor. You can't.'

The Doctor smiled and said in a low but clear voice, 'I don't want simple explanations. I like to have an enquiring mind.'

The Creator started. Stable orbit? Weather shadows? That couldn't be right, could it? He scrambled for his meteorological atlas. Then he tore through *Care Of Your Flock* instead. He still had a job to do.

The Doctor's smile faded and his voice became an urgent growl. 'Your survival depends on you understanding what's going on and then finding a solution. Now, why haven't you been affected?'

A gasp from Slove cut them all short. His skin was turning a mouldy blue, like blotting paper soaking up water. His eyes, now

reddened, were staring and his mouth gaped.

Mrs Hendricks collapsed into sobbing shrieks. Mel resolutely

herded the group away from the afflicted boy. The Doctor unfurled his umbrella and brandished it like a shield. The seconds were marked by Slove's shuffling footsteps as he shambled towards them.

Suddenly, a pungent smell of mint and fish filled the hall. Mr Hendricks walked through the group and towards his now twisted son. He held a smoking chalice.

'I thought it must be the incense,' he said softly. 'It wasn't hard to work out. We're the only ones who've inhaled it, so we're not affected. My boy has breathed only some of it, so this spread – whatever it is – affected him more slowly.'

Mr Hendrick's sad eyes watched Slove stagger, clutch the air, sink to his knees and collapse on the ground. The once-blue skin was now a deathly white. With his eyes now shut, Mr Hendricks said quietly, 'Mr Jenson's made vats of the stuff.'

The Creator watched as they left the hall, Mr Hendricks carrying Slove's body as his wife sobbed on Mrs Prendergast's shoulder. He watched them put torches to the Committee of Worship building and he saw the dry wood smoulder and then ignite. The flames were fierce and red against the blackening sky. The smoke was thick and grey and, as he looked from screen to screen, he could see it flow over the wailing blue horde like a wave. As it passed, it left a trail of prone figures, as if washed up on a shore. The chorus of moans became quieter and weaker until all was silence.

Except, at last, for the patter of the rain beginning.

Within twenty minutes, the flock he had loved and nurtured lay

still and pale as stone. The Creator saw movement drain from screen after screen until only one image showed anything but complete stillness. The five remaining figures stood mournfully and the Doctor's voice came through the loudspeakers.

'Time comes like the tide: it wears us away year after year until, all at once, it crashes down and changes us.'

And then the Creator threw the last switch.

He stood back from the control panels as a symphony of pops and sparks rang from the instrument banks. The screens flickered for a moment then went black. The chimes and sirens were cut off. The incessant hum of energy choked to a halt. The Creator raised his head and laughed as the power was channelled away from the chamber...

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120

... and into the clouds. Suddenly there was an almighty peal of thunder and lightning filled the sky. The Hendricks, Mrs Prendergast, the Doctor and Mel gazed stunned as, with another tremendous crack of thunder, a colossal bolt of blue-white electricity struck the wet ground and rippled across the landscape of hundreds of deathly figures. And then a second ripple came, this time like a breeze passing over a field of corn. In unison, as if waking from the same dream, each person sat bolt upright and a thousand new breaths were drawn simultaneously.

Bork awoke in a tangle of bikes and bodies. Why was he here? What had happened? Fragments of his identity seemed to flit by like

fish under the surface of a murky pond. He looked around. Everyone wore a similar puzzled expression, except one woman. Her cheeks were reddening, just like everyone else's. Colour was rushing back into everyone's skin. The woman was familiar to him, like she was a thread that would lead back to his memories. He grasped it. This was Rudl. Didn't they love each other? He wasn't sure. He knew he loved her. She caught his eye, smiled and waved to him. Instantly he knew. Yes, she loved him, too. But why was she dressed as half an ocelot?

Slove frowned at the people standing over him. He knew them, didn't he? Suddenly there were people hugging him, crying and laughing. These were his parents? These were his parents! He laughed with the joy of knowing such a simple thing. He gave up trying to remember what had happened to him. It didn't matter. Anything really important would come back to him. He squeezed his mother and father tightly through their coarse robes and laughed. 'What are you two wearing?'

In front of the blackened remains of the Committee of Worship building, Mrs Prendergast gleefully surveyed the rising multitude with Mel and the Doctor. 'Truly a miracle!' she exclaimed.

The Doctor smoothly replied, 'The death of the fungus caused the nervous systems of those infected to shut down. The lightning charge was at the exact frequency to restart their bodies. The charge hit the wet ground so the current was carried across the whole crowd.'

‘You’re not even convincing yourself, are you?’ Mel laughed.

The Doctor smiled. ‘Not entirely, no.’

‘For once, you can’t claim that you’d planned this all along.’

‘I’d certainly never accept that!’ Mrs Prendergast snorted.

The Doctor shook his umbrella. He looked thoughtfully at its

handle, the shape of a question mark. ‘Sometimes it’s worth a try,’

he chuckled. ‘Some people will believe anything.’

The Creator snapped *Care Of Your Flock* shut and placed it, along with *Care Of Your Kingdom*, in the battered case he’d packed. He smiled as he mused on where he’d hide the books. Somewhere his

people would find them... eventually.

He whistled as he made his way out of the dormant control room.

He glanced back at his cracked mug, his calendar and the faded sign saying ‘Of Course I’m Not Busy – I Got It Right The First Time!’

Once he started smiling, he found he couldn’t stop. Boy, he needed a holiday. And no more ‘the Creator’. From now on, it’d be just

plain old Leslie.

His white robe had been swapped for a flowery shirt. He’d kept

the sandals. There wasn’t anything more comfortable for his feet in this universe. Before he turned out the lights in the silent chamber, he paused. Should he leave a note? He rubbed his now-smooth chin.

Nah. Keep ’em guessing.

What Has Happened to the

Magic of ‘Doctor Who’?

V

Gareth Roberts

Mr Graham Williams

Producer, 'Doctor Who'

22nd October 1979

Dear Mr Williams,

I have enjoyed 'Doctor Who' for many years, but I'm afraid that,

following the increasingly silly antics of the recent stories under your guidance, I shall no longer remain a viewer.

The bloodcurdling horror and adult approach to the depiction of

violence and terror shown in the earlier stories of the fourth Doctor has been swept away. The new stories are lightweight and frothy

and often depart into clever-clever, pseudo-intellectual 'banter' that must baffle most children and embarrass a good proportion of

adults. Plus the Doctor himself – always a stern figure of authority from William Hattnell onwards – has developed a marked tendency

for buffoonery. The third Doctor was a man of action and scientific brilliance. This Doctor bumbles through his adventures, with

Romana and K9 being much cleverer than him – and thus

seemingly invulnerable to any danger that comes their way. K9 is

an unutterably silly creation, and the attempts to make him 'sweet'

– getting lost on the river, etc – are merely embarrassing in a series that only a few years ago, with stories such as the one with the brain in the tank, was quite deadly serious and all the better for it.

Added to this, the storytelling has become more and more manic

and more and more complex. The recent Mona Lisa story was

incredibly difficult to follow, seeming to move from one location to the next – modern-day Paris, Leonardo's studio, the primeval

wasteland – with scarcely time to breathe. There is often just too

much going on, and what is going on is plain daft.

An alien commissioning Leonardo to paint copies of the Mona

Lisa to sell in hundreds of years' time is certainly an original

123

notion, but not what we have come to associate as viewers with the simple, straightforward storytelling of 'Doctor Who'. As for the

scene of Doctor Who and friends trying to hail a taxi in time to save the human race – preposterous nonsense. This is an adventure series with a dash of horror, not a bizarre experimental comedy. See also the 'scissors cuts paper' routine between the Doctor and Romana in the previous story. Wasn't there a simpler, more sincere, less 'cute'

way of telling us about the dilemma the poor Daleks were caught up in?

I can see no signs of improvement to 'Doctor Who'. The magic

of the Hammer Horror-style stories has evaporated, and I have no

intention of watching any longer.

Alastair Conley, Bristol

What Has Happened to the Magic of 'Doctor Who'? continues on page 148

124

The Reign Makers

Gareth Wigmore

An adventure of the First Doctor, with Susan, Ian and Barbara

The King of England couldn't sleep. In the name of Heaven, he

thought, who could sleep at a time such as this? He opened his eyes and listened as well as he could to the sounds of the night. The day to come would see him either dead or a glorious victor. Whichever

it was to be, it would not be his doing – it would be God's will.

It was difficult to hear anything over the fat raindrops slapping onto the tent canvas all around him. Where had it come from, and so suddenly? He had prayed for rain for a week and his prayers had been answered. Was God on his side? It seemed so. Or perhaps this change in weather had come too late to make any difference to the outcome of the battle. Underneath the rain he could make out the low murmurings from his men, camped all around him, much snoring, the occasional fart (forgivable in an army where half his men were suffering – if not dying – from dysentery), and more talk than he liked.

He lifted a flap in the tent and could see fires out there. The men were trying to stay warm but he'd given strict orders. If his army was going to survive the following day, discipline was paramount.

'Simon?' he called.

'Your Majesty?' came the page's light voice.

'Tell the sentries to enforce darkness in the camp.' He sat up in his makeshift bed – nothing more than blankets on bare earth – suddenly angry. 'Tell them to make it known that if a gentleman should so much as think about lighting a fire, he'll lose his horse and harness to me. And if he's a commoner, he will lose his right ear.'

He couldn't see the face of Simon Foreman, but he could hear the hesitation in his voice. 'His right ear, Your Majesty?'

'You heard me, page. These fools don't think. The more we're visible, the more it's clear to the French how few of us there are and therefore the easier it would be for them to surprise us in the night. Now be about it.'

'Of course, Your Majesty. Right away.' Off he scampered,

leaving Henry alone for a moment. He heard voices, seemingly

close by, only to realise they were speaking French. The opposing

army was so close he could hear its tittle-tattle above that of his own! It was also, he reminded himself, something approaching ten

times the size of what was left of the army that had accompanied

him from Southampton three months earlier. Perhaps, in truth, the

noise of sixty thousand arrogant, prating Frenchmen obliterated all sound from six thousand tired and sick Englishmen, most of whom,

he was sure, expected to be washed away by a French tide once

dawn broke.

He would not sleep tonight, that much was certain. He pulled up

his nightshirt, his knees sinking into the ground under his slight weight, and he prayed aloud.

'My father's sins are not my sins, O Lord! You know the secrets

of my heart, that my cause is right and good, and my goal sincerely meant.' He opened his eyes, rising to his feet and saw that Simon

Foreman had returned, standing expectantly by the mouth of the

tent, panting for want of breath. He looked almost womanish in the scant light, Henry thought – a trick of the shadows hinted at breasts under his loose gown. The king suppressed a rush of desire he

wanted to feel neither at all, nor especially now, on the eve of battle.

'I want Sir John Cornwall, boy. Bring him.'

'Yes, Your Majesty.'

Minutes later, the new page stood watching as the King, dressed

in cloth breeches and a light shirt, briefed Cornwall on the

surveillance mission he wanted the knight to lead, scouting out the battlefield in the moonlight. 'And now,' the King said when

Cornwall had gone, ‘I have to wait and see what he reports.’

The boy smiled. ‘Nothing to do till then, Your Majesty?’ He had

big eyes and thin, long lips, and extremely clear skin and white

teeth. *No wonder I spotted him in the ranks the other day*, the King mused. A face like that is a precious jewel. *It’s a wonder I never noticed her, I mean, him before.* For all he was the King and used to subservience and flattery with every utterance that reached his ears, Henry felt old and foolish. He was twice this boy’s age, and several hundred times as ugly; the left side of his face was a livid scar from long ago, when an arrow had nearly killed him at Shrewsbury as he

fought so that his father could keep his ill-gotten crown. The king could feel the blood pumping under that scar now.

‘Not a thing,’ said Henry. ‘Until we know what we’re facing,

how I can know what formation I’ll want the army to deploy? How

can I truly prepare?’ He flung his arms wide, and turned away. ‘I

am impatient, Simon!’

‘And with everyone asleep, Your Majesty,’ the page said, ‘how

could we make the time pass? I could polish your armour.’

‘Yes,’ he said, listening to his own voice carefully, ‘you could

polish my armour. I’m sure it needs a good scrub. Or –’

‘Or?’

Henry turned back to Simon, who had come forward into the tent,

his cap off and the finger of one hand tugging at his lower lip, an exaggerated assumption of thoughtfulness. The boy was shockingly

pretty. Henry distinctly felt the need to get out of that tent. ‘I have it! Let’s go out into the army and test the spirit of the men. Let’s see if we can’t cheer them a little.’

The boy’s face fell. ‘In this rain? Is that such a good idea, Your

Majesty?'

'What's rain to us, Simon? We are men!' He put an arm round

the page's slim shoulders and hugged him manfully. 'God gave us

skins to keep the rain out! And we can go disguised, as though I

were just a common soldier.'

Susan Foreman, traveller in time and space, whose acting talents

were waning fast, smiled thinly. 'Isn't there anything you'd rather do before the morning, what might be our last?' she asked the King, desperate to keep him in his tent and away from the Doctor, Ian and Barbara and their activities on the battlefield. 'Anything in the

warm and dry?'

Henry simply ruffled her hair.

To Susan, it was obvious that, for all his desire to stay in disguise, Henry found it almost impossible. His royalty – his aura of

command and final say-so – was not something he could simply

shrug off like a damp, unwanted cloak, and in their first, whispered conversation with a group of soggy soldiers out in the camp, he was quick to anger.

'We all saw them this afternoon. God knows how many

Frenchies there are,' one of his men had said. 'You can hear them

now.' And they could. Susan could hear French-accented voices in

some sort of party, celebrating their victory before it had come,

even over the rain.

'There's a damn sight more of them than there are of us, that's for sure,' said another.

'And how many Englishmen are sleeping in the dry at home?'

said the men's knight, Sir Walter Hungerford, wiping the rain from his face with a cloth. 'An extra ten thousand archers wouldn't go

amiss, would they?' The grunts of assent and shakes of the head

from the other men had drawn Henry to his feet, throwing his hood

back to reveal his face properly, the scars showing beyond doubt

that he was their king.

'That is a foolish way to talk,' he told them, his voice all steel and 127

fury as they scrambled to attention. 'My army is God's army. He

has chosen these men to stand with me and fight today, and I

wouldn't have one man more here than those whom God has

deigned to give me.' He sneered, waving an arm at the sounds of the French revelry. 'Do you not think that God, with us as His humble army, can send these knaves packing? These Frenchmen who boast of how many prisoners they will take and how much slaughter they will do?'

His voice dropped, more encouraging than chiding now. 'Come the morning, God willing, we will prevail, if every man stands at his appointed post and does what his King asks. Will you do it, men?'

The story was much the same wherever they went. The men were cold, wet and miserable, and it didn't take long for them to say something that pushed the King into giving each of them their 'little touch of Harry in the night'. Susan was impressed by the sunshine he left in his wake on that damp field in the darkness. The English situation seemed hopeless, yet the King's personality inexplicably cheered soldiers, roused spirits and shored up the men's confidence for what the morning would bring. There was something of alchemy in that sheer charisma, she thought, knowing that Henry himself couldn't have explained quite how he did it.

But Susan wasn't just observing. She was also trying her best to keep the King's attention from a certain quarter at the fringes of the English camp, above which occasional flashes bleached the black of the night sky. She'd hidden the noise of a couple of explosions with some judicious coughing and a mock-choking on some beer swilled at an opportune moment. But she wouldn't be able to keep Henry from Grandfather's rockets for long, and the King was slowly but surely moving through the camp in his direction.

She remembered the bitter argument between Barbara and the Doctor when he'd proposed his plan to them. 'Can't we just let

events run their course, Doctor?' the history teacher had asked. 'We all know what happens. The rain, when it comes, turns the

battlefield into a quagmire and it suits the English better than the French. But it was the English bowmen who really won the day,

wasn't it?'

The Doctor had been in a state of high agitation, to the point of

rudeness. 'This woman taught you history, you say?' he'd appealed

to Susan. 'Surely you know, Barbara, that the French forces were

largely knights in plate armour – human tanks – sitting on

horseback? They should have made mincemeat of the English, but

the second they were in the mud they were finished. Their horses

couldn't move and they threw their riders off. If the French knights landed face down, they drowned. If they landed face up, they

couldn't right themselves. The English longbow was only so

devastating because the French were sitting ducks!'

Susan had watched Barbara boil up into barely restrained anger.

'So we make ourselves accomplices to the wholesale slaughter of

tens of thousands of men? Surely the right thing to do would be to stay out of the way and let things happen naturally?'

But Grandfather's face had taken on that sad, wise look that she

knew so well, the one she only saw when he was unhappy to be in

the right. She could have told Barbara then that further struggle was useless. 'Barbara, Barbara,' he'd said, shaking his head. 'We know what history tells us happened. Our problem is that we must – let

there be no doubt about it – we must make sure that it happens in

the way we know as natural. You talk about slaughter, but those

men have always died and always must. If we don't act, I'm afraid that all history would be rewritten. The consequences could ripple out to the very end of creation! Maybe we were always meant to be here to do this. Maybe if we weren't here, time would find another way to do what needs to be done.' His bright eyes had seemed to fix on a point far off in the distance. 'But here we are and, as far as I can tell, we're all that stands in the way of history moving off its rightful track. We simply have to make it rain!'

Susan thought about all this while burbling something inane – something that might have innocently precipitated the invention of the umbrella by several centuries – to try to mask another small explosion some way above them. But Henry wasn't listening. 'Did you see that, Simon?' He'd stopped in his tracks and was gazing upwards.

Susan froze. The game was up. 'See what, Your Majesty?'

'I thought I saw a flash in the sky. A shooting star, perhaps?'

'Or a comet? A good augury for the battle?'

Henry snorted in the lamplight – Susan had convinced him to break his own rule rather than risk losing his footing in the wet – and brushed the rain from his upturned face. 'I do not believe in auguries, page.'

Without warning, a patch of sky lit up for a split-second again. There was an intense, white flash of something like lightning but was, somehow, obviously not. Susan swore she could hear the Doctor chortling in the stillness after its accompanying bang had died away.

'What is that?' Henry asked, more to himself than to her, she

thought. Then, what she'd dreaded: 'Come, Simon. I'd swear it's coming from over here.' And he was off at a quick march, jumping over bodies of sleeping Englishmen and rushing through newly formed puddles and ground turning rapidly to mud.

129

'Are you sure, Your Majesty?' Susan knew she had to try to delay him. Every flash meant another rocket, and the more that the Doctor and Ian sent into the clouds, the more likely it would be that history would run its appointed course. 'I'm cold. Can't we go back?' She caught a whiff of gunpowder and other chemicals. They made for a sharp contrast to the flat smell of the muddying earth.

'By all means go back,' Henry called without turning, 'but I go on! It might be the start of a French barrage, or someone sending signals, or who knows what.'

Susan cursed under her breath. She wondered whether there was any point in pretending a sprained ankle or some other injury, but she'd quickly got to know the King over these past couple of days and knew how single-minded he could be. The King was fond of his page, but that was all. He loved his army much more, with all his soul, and he would do anything to protect it. So she scampered after him, hoping to get in front and lead him astray.

She failed. From a hundred metres or so to one side of them they saw the flash of the launch this time. Before it had been hidden from view by a little bill but now Henry stared at the rocket's trail, a thin golden arc splitting the blackness momentarily before the familiar white burst. The king promptly changed direction, making Susan scrabble through the mud behind him, all the time imploring

him to slow down.

‘... a good one, Doctor,’ she heard Ian say long before she saw

him. ‘How many are left?’

‘There should be another ten or twelve, Chesterton,’ her

grandfather replied.

‘We’ll have to be careful. The ground under the launcher was

solid when we started but it’s a swamp now,’ the younger man

warned, and there was the sound of striking matches. Henry blocked Susan’s path with an outstretched arm and used his cloak to shield both their lamps, peering into a clearing just on the edge of the

English camp, trying to view it only by the faint moonlight.

It was clear to Susan what was happening, though goodness knew

what Henry made of it. Where he would have seen a man in his

thirties hunched over a long row of metal tubes fixed in a rack,

holding a tiny flame, she saw Ian lighting one of the candle-string fuses she had hacked out of a block of wax with a kitchen knife.

The fuse was attached to one of many misshapen tin cylinders about a metre tall, drawn to crude points at the top. And there, in clear sight, was the most important person in her life, her grandfather, whom the King must have seen as a slight, very old and very wet

man, his long, white hair uncharacteristically smeared with dirt, and lank against his neck.

She looked up at Henry to see what he made of it but, at that

second, he was rushing across the clearing towards Ian.

‘Chesterton!’ cried the Doctor, too late. There was a slicing noise –

metal against metal – and she saw the younger man’s back arch in

tension. She moved to her grandfather’s side and instinctively

clutched at him; the King's sword was poised under Ian's throat.

'If you so much as move, traitor, you will die,' Henry warned.

In the same, measured tone of voice, Susan heard her former

science teacher say, 'We both need to move, quite quickly. I've just lit the fuse for this rocket. In about half a minute it will launch. If we don't back away to the edge of the clearing now we're likely to both be set on fire.'

'Then put it out, man,' the King ordered.

'I shan't do that,' Ian replied. 'And we're not traitors. We serve King Henry.'

The king laughed. 'If that were true, you'd put it out. I shall do it myself.' He lifted his foot to stub out the sputtering flame on the fuse, travelling fast along the ground towards the rocket launcher, but there was a sudden blur of motion, a shadow, and Henry was

sprawled on the wet ground. Standing over him was Barbara

Wright. 'We don't have time for this, whoever you are,' said the

woman who had taught Susan all about the Battle of Agincourt at

Coal Hill School, dropping the stout branch with which she had

whacked him over the head and then helping Ian drag his body

away from the launcher. Before they'd reached Susan and the

Doctor, the fuse had reached the rocket.

'You've just knocked out the King of England!' Susan shouted,

but no one heard a thing because in that second there was flame,

smoke and a sudden inrush of air. The clearing burst momentarily

into light as another rocket raced high into the night sky, seeding the clouds above with chemicals causing the downpour that, the

next day, would bring King Henry V his famous victory.

The smell of the chemicals receded as Ian and Barbara left the

clearing where they'd launched the rockets, and headed towards the woods in which they'd agreed to meet the Doctor and the TARDIS.

Now the air had that metallic taste that comes with heavy rain. It even overpowered the stink from the English army, which had

certainly not gone away.

'A bit of a show?' repeated Ian, causing Barbara to snap out of

her reverie. She started to reply when she suddenly tensed, a noise close by bringing a touch of fear back into her stomach.

'Ian,' she said, stretching a hand out to stop him in mid-stride,

'did you hear some –'

A large, familiar face of which Barbara had seen all too much that evening loomed out of the blackness, its mouth open and filling the air with obscenities. 'Witch!' the blacksmith shouted, reaching for her with a bony hand. 'How can you be standing, after what you

drank before? It must be witchcraft and you shall burn for it! Here she is, lads, and one of her thieving friends!' While the Doctor and Ian had constructed the rockets in the village smithy earlier that night, Barbara had kept its owner distracted in a drinking contest that had looked as though it'd come straight out of a Brueghel

painting, all one-legged peasants and rustic wenches. Here he was

again, apparently angry about having been beaten – and about his

forge having been ransacked by the Doctor.

'Where, Jean?' she heard more than one voice asking. 'Where?'

'Here they are! I've got them!'

Barbara felt Ian's hand grasp hers and heard rather than saw the

impact of his lamp smashing into the face of Jean le Forgeron,

sending teeth flying. 'Quick, Barbara! This way!'

It was just the moment for her foot to get stuck in the mud, but

Ian had such a firm grip on her that he bodily pulled her out of her left shoe, leaving it limp in the mud with the blacksmith groping

around it. ‘They’re heading to Tramecourt woods! The woods!’ she

heard the blacksmith cry behind them, to repeated shouts of it from his comrades. ‘He’s a vicious one! Watch yourselves!’

‘Dangerous when roused,’ she heard Ian mutter through gritted

teeth. Barbara felt as though she couldn’t have spoken to save her life – she was already out of breath and panting fast. *Damn this stupid dress!* she thought, nearly tripping over herself; not for the first time. *Give me aliens and spacemen any day! History is just too dangerous!*

A few minutes earlier, she’d returned from the King’s tent and

watched Ian staring upwards, his handsome head and hair

bedraggled beyond belief. She saw with satisfaction the last of the rockets explode high above them, a pinprick of light blossoming for a moment and then it was gone. ‘A good job done,’ he said to the

air. ‘All’s well in Merrie England tonight.’

She took him by the arm and saw his anxious, determined face

crease into a sort of fond pride as he caught sight of her in the

moonlight. ‘You look lovely,’ he said in a schoolboy sort of way

that made her heart skip. She knew she wasn’t especially lovely, not really. ‘I mean,’ he told her, and she could imagine his cheeks

growing hot, ‘you look so excited.’

‘The Battle of Agincourt. Never done that before.’ She smiled,

but her mind was really on the wet and cold. ‘We’ve done all we

can, Ian. Let’s get away into the trees and under cover.’

He shook his head. ‘I don’t think I’ll ever be dry again.’

‘Think of all those poor soldiers out in the mud,’ she said. ‘No

tents for anyone but the highest nobility. They're huddled under

cloaks, trying to keep their swords from rusting and their

bowstrings from shrivelling up in the wet.' She laughed a little

giddily. The Doctor had given her a pill that, as if by magic, kept her sober, but some of the beer she'd drank her way through earlier in that ridiculous contest was obviously still sloshing around her brain. 'That's supposed to be where "keep it under your hat" comes from. I wish I'd asked Susan to check.'

'What?'

'The English archers were meant to have kept their bowstrings

dry under their hats.'

Ian shrugged. 'I didn't know that.'

She looked at him very directly through the deluge. 'Well,

travelling with the Doctor – and with me, come to that – is very

educational.'

'Oh yes. Very improving,' he said, mock-serious. 'I hardly know

myself, these days.'

Silence fell for a few minutes as they walked on, the rain still

falling in sheets around them. 'So, come on, then,' he asked in the end. 'What did the three of you do with Henry V? You just whisked

him off, leaving me to light the blue touchpaper.'

'Nothing, really.'

'Nothing, really?' he asked, incredulous.

'Well, we just put on a bit of a show for him.' Barbara frowned

into the dark at the memory of the past half hour, and how very odd it had been. She'd had to take the lead because she was the one that Henry hadn't seen, but she hadn't enjoyed it. It had taken all the Doctor's powers of persuasion, days earlier, to convince her that

they needed to intervene so strongly in the first place, and she had remained sceptical for a while. She'd seen the vast French army,

and the idea of being complicit in their slaughter was repugnant to her. Needless to say, the old man had won that particular battle, as surely as the English would tomorrow. So she'd bitten her tongue

and played her part in convincing King Henry, a legend from

history and literature, that she was an agent of a benign God sent to bring divine assistance to the English cause. The fact that he might well have been concussed probably helped. She thought of the

Doctor and how little they knew about him, and wondered how

much of what she'd told Henry was a lie. After all, neither she nor Ian, even with his grasp of science, really understood how the

Doctor had made the downpour happening all around this little

corner of France. One man's technology was another man's

mumbo-jumbo.

'"A bit of a show"?' Ian had repeated. That had been the moment

when things had gone drastically wrong once again. Back in the

moment, she tried to listen to their pursuers over the sounds of her own breathing, the falling rain, and the squelching of every footstep in the mud. 'I can't keep up this pace, Ian,' she told him, cursing her own weakness.

Without talking about it he threw himself, and her with him,

down to the mud just after they'd cleared a small hill, pushing her close in to its side with an outstretched hand on her back. She

fought down her breath desperately – it sounded loud in her ears as children screaming in a playground, or the motor of a bus gurgling as it stood in traffic. Footsteps went past them, so close she was sure could smell the villager's garlic breath. 'This way! Hurry!' She closed her eyes, and wondered whether fate would have her burned

as a witch in medieval France, but the villager rushed by without

noticing them.

Miserable hours passed. They listened to the sounds of the

blacksmith and his friends searching for them. Even after they

hadn't heard anything for a while, they didn't feel safe enough to head for the woods and their meagre cover, so the teachers sat in

silence pressed against each other as the night wore on, sheltering from the rain as best they could, drifting in and out of sleep, the only warmth coming from their own bodies. Finally, Barbara woke

to see the blue-black of night lifting a little to a pinkish-grey in the distance. She pushed a reluctant Ian awake. 'Time to leave,' she

said, 'before people start dying.'

'Well, well,' said the Doctor, looking down into the four

outstretched swords of the men who had intercepted him and Susan

as they had wandered blithely into the rear of the French camp. 'I don't suppose you'd be interested in this, would you?' He pulled a block of metal out of one pocket. The large amount of silver

required for the rain-making had been acquired from local churches and melted down, the theft blamed on the English. This was a

leftover. 'Genuine silver, and all yours, gentlemen, if you'll just let us pass.'

One of the Frenchmen grabbed for it.

'Give it here!' cried another.

'We'll split it! We'll split it!' shouted a third.

A fourth just waded into the others with the flat of his sword,

knocking it clean out of the first one's hands and to the earth,

sending all of the men scrabbling in the mud for it.

'If you'll excuse us then, good fellows,' the Doctor said, giving a 134

hoot of self-congratulation and pushing Susan on through the camp

towards the collection of carts where, with any luck, the TARDIS would be waiting. It had been too heavily guarded for them to get near it previously, but now that the French army was massing for battle, all eyes were on the English. ‘Do you think the Ship will still be there, Grandfather?’ Susan asked by his side, as they hurried onwards.

‘Oh, no doubt, no doubt,’ the Doctor said, hoping he was right.

‘Why would anyone move it? They can’t get in. It’s just a big, blue box to them. They probably think they can take a proper look at it once the English have been defeated, when they have chance.’ He squeezed her arm in a gesture of encouragement. ‘But we’ll be long gone by then.’

‘ *Monsieur, wait!* ’ a voice cried out behind them, and the Doctor turned to see one of the avaricious guards – sadly, one with a rather stronger sense of duty than the others – running towards them through the rain and mud. ‘Stop!’

‘Perhaps we’d better get a move on, child,’ the Doctor told her.

‘This way!’ The ground was so wet now that one could hardly run on it, and although they had trouble moving through the rear of the army, their pursuer couldn’t gain ground. He was quickly lost behind a straggling group of crossbowmen. Each man they passed looked at the travellers warily but they were too wrapped up in their own thoughts to stop them, and no one had heard the cries of their pursuer over the sounds of war-trumpets and drums.

In no time at all they were inside the TARDIS, and the Doctor had only just turned on the scanner to get a better look at the battle lines when Ian and Barbara started to hammer on the doors.

‘It’s David and Goliath stuff, isn’t it?’ the science teacher said sadly, gazing up at the small screen, its usual colourful display

showing only dull browns and greys. It gave an aerial view of the armies still in their tight formations waiting for battle to begin, the invaders' tiny body of men standing firm, but dwarfed by the French in their armour. 'The French are so proud, so confident.'

'So they should be,' added Barbara. 'They're not the joke the history books make them out to be – they're formidable fighters. Listen to me! I'm talking in the present tense. This is really happening!'

'And they're about to be wiped out,' Susan finished.

Whether out of respect for the men who would die that day, or out of a sense of guilt at the part he or she had played, no one spoke for a moment.

'A medieval battle,' said the Doctor eventually. 'I've never really 135 observed one up close. Do you want to stay and –'

'Watch a massacre?' Barbara found it hard to believe the Doctor could be so cold. 'I really don't think so, Doctor.'

The old man thumbed his lapels, contemplating. 'You're probably right, Barbara. It would be ghoulish and dangerous, for all that it might be fascinating. We'll be on our way. Oh! Just one thing.' He grabbed at the lever that opened the TARDIS doors, and popped his head around them to look out at the 15th-century sky.

He stuck a finger in his mouth and tested the wind. 'Yes, yes,' he muttered, 'that rain will keep on for days yet.'

There was a strange, almost musical twang far off, and a loud whistling above the noise of the rain. The sky fell dark, as though a great, dark cloud had covered the weak sun. The Doctor turned his head to see what it was. For a second he glimpsed the first lethal hail

of a thousand English arrows seemingly poised in mid-air.

Before gravity had taken hold and they arced down to meet their targets, the doors of the police box were closed and the ship was fading out of the world.

136

Pass It On

Simon Guerrier

An adventure of the Second Doctor, with the Sixth Doctor

Mabel didn't see the man and the man didn't see Mabel. She was making her way down Wells Street, lugging her groceries home and idly imagining a handsome prince declining his crown for her. She barely noticed the little man with his face looking straight up at the sky before he bashed into her.

'Oh!' he cried, leaping backwards, landing one foot on the edge of the pavement and one foot in the road, arms windmilling as he vainly tried to keep his balance. His fingers struck the large paper bags Mabel held tightly to her. One parcel escaped as the man fell backwards into the road. He covered his face with his arms, and plums and orange pippins rained down on his elbows.

'I'm very sorry,' said Mabel in the voice she reserved for tradesmen – a good enough impression of how they spoke on the wireless. As she stared down at this strange man in his dishevelled tailcoat, she felt a sudden surge of anger – this hadn't been her fault!

'Oh dear, oh dear,' he said miserably as he sat up. Anyone else would have got out of the road immediately, but this odd man with

the careworn face stayed there, as if getting his bearings. She concluded that he must be some kind of vagrant or vagabond, and felt a thrill of revulsion.

'Anyway,' said Mabel, still speaking like the BBC.

'Oh yes, I mustn't delay you,' said the man, struggling to his feet. His bandy-legged posture made her think for a moment he'd done himself an injury, but he quickly hopped about gathering up Mabel's groceries and tins. Two tins of meatballs had rolled down the road and he gamely chased after them. She felt torn – she could just walk away, hurry across Oxford Street and into a side alley and lose him for good. Yet here he was, collecting her items, impishly eager to please. Her fingers played with the end of the fox fur round her neck. Something in her might have screamed in frustration but she kept her lips pressed tight together.

'There,' he said eventually, presenting the soggy, torn bags with her shopping stuffed inside. 'No harm done. Well, not really.' His 137 eyes twinkled with mischief as if this had all been some kind of prank. With his unkempt hair and clothes he still had an air of quiet authority about him. He might have been ruined by the stock exchange six years before, Mabel imagined, but she felt that, rather than just getting on with things as best one could, as everyone else in the country had needed to, this man was relishing his dishevelled state. Oh, look – his left shoe's sole was coming loose, flapping and slapping against the pavement. Perhaps he was one of these artist types who played at living as a tramp.

'You should pay more attention to where you're going,' she chided and his smile faltered, his eyes opened wide in remorse.

'But I was,' he said, exasperated. 'It's just I'm going up there.'

Laden down with shopping he couldn't free a hand to point.

Instead, he twisted and nodded his head upwards. Despite herself,

Mabel looked at the sky.

Clouds pressed low onto the city but, puttering silently through

the grey drear, there was some new kind of airship, floating

majestically and completely still.

'Hang on,' said Mabel, forgetting her accent, 'that wasn't there a minute ago.'

'No? Perhaps it's only visible if you try to see it, or if you know to look for it. But it will be off soon, I expect. Now they've had someone fix their engines.'

Mabel didn't know what to say to that or to the earnest way in

which he'd said it. They stood there, gazing at each other, with him still holding her bags. There was something expectant about him,

like a scraggy dog waiting for her to throw him a stick.

'Well,' she said. 'I must get on home.' She made to reach for her

shopping bags, but he took a step back and had the gall to look

affronted.

'Oh no,' he told her, quite horrified. 'I can carry these. It's the least that I can do.'

Mabel sniffed. She didn't want him in her life for a moment

longer but he had a point. With her joints and her left hip playing up she always struggled with the shopping. Besides, she thought, it

showed some hint of good character that he sought to make amends.

These things ought to be encouraged.

'Very well,' she muttered. 'I'm on Broadwick Street. It's this

way.'

She led him with all the majesty she could muster, bothered that passers-by might think he was her husband. The man had a funny way of walking, like some kind of clown. And she noticed how his eyes darted about, taking in the shops and cars and people, drinking up the detail. His gaze fixed on her again.

‘I never asked your name,’ he said.

‘Mrs Mabel Carter,’ she said. ‘And you are?’

‘Oh, I’m just called the Doctor. Have you always lived in London?’

She pursed her lips, flared her nostrils, as if smelling something pungent. ‘Why would you want to know?’

‘I suspect I was just making conversation,’ he said, again with that wicked twinkle.

‘Very well,’ Mabel told him, not sure why her cheeks were flushing. He was the one being rude! ‘Yes,’ she said. ‘I’ve always lived in London.’ She walked on a few steps. ‘Except for a couple of years when I lived in Shropshire with my husband.’ Again she continued walking, bothered that the Doctor hadn’t said anything in response. ‘But he was killed in Ypres, so I came back home.’

The Doctor didn’t say he was sorry, but nodded sadly.

They carried on a short while and then Mabel found she couldn’t stand the silence.

‘I couldn’t do anything else,’ she told him. ‘My parents needed looking after. It was just going to be for a short while, at first, until I worked out something else. And now it’s twenty years later. My sister sometimes comes to help but she has her own family to deal

with. So I just get on with it. That's what you have to do.'

Again the Doctor said nothing. He seemed content just to listen,

perhaps even eager to do so. How strange to have someone

interested in her! She remembered how it had been with Raymond

in their courting days before the war. The afternoons had all seemed sunny then, with the smell of freshly cut hay. She had been a

different person. She had been alive.

'What else would I do?' she asked the Doctor. 'What would you

do in my place?' In fact, she suddenly needed to know. So she

stopped there, in the middle of the street, and turned back to the Doctor. Something creaked above them, something enormous.

Mabel looked up towards the noise to see that the odd airship had

sailed off. She twisted round, trying to find it in the sky, surprised by its unlikely speed. All she could see was a pale orange tinge in the air where the airship had been. It began to patter with rain.

The Doctor blinked at her, looking uncomfortable – though that

might have been the weight of her bags of groceries that shifted in his arms. 'I hope I'd be like you,' he replied, no hint in the warm gravel of his voice that he was mocking her. She felt as if he wanted to distract her. 'And I would try to do what I could. Make the best of things.'

'Precisely,' she told him, turning the corner on to Broadwick

Street and in sight of her terraced house. 'That's precisely what I 139

do. I never ask for thanks, which is just as well.'

Across the road, she spotted Mrs Benson and Mrs James by the

road, gossiping as they did most days. Mabel acknowledged them

with a brief nod, making it clear that she didn't have time to join them. She felt their eyes pick over the shambling figure beside her.

She felt a pang at the thought that she would have to explain to

them who the Doctor was, and felt a second of elation at being – for the first time in as long as she could remember – the subject of their gossip.

'Friends of yours?' asked the Doctor.

'Yes,' she told him. 'No. Oh, I don't know. They're just people

who live on the street.'

The Doctor's eyes twinkled. 'Not in the houses?'

Mabel hoped he couldn't see that his silly joke had made her

smile. Now they were at her house. She felt oddly self-conscious

and didn't want him to see where she lived. She certainly didn't

want him inside. Her parents would expect her to put on the kettle and she hated the thought of the Doctor having to sit with them

while she fussed in the kitchen. He would sit there, making polite conversation while Daddy ignored him in favour of the racing pages and Mum just smiled and smiled. Mabel felt an awful, burning

shame at the unspeakable commonness of her home life. She didn't

want this kind and friendly stranger to see the morbid cage in which she lived.

'I'll take those now, thank you,' she told the Doctor, reaching for the packages in his arms. There was a moment of awkwardness as

the Doctor carefully passed the groceries to Mabel without spilling any of the bags' contents. Finally she prised them from him and he stepped quickly back.

'Well, there we are,' he said at length.

'Yes,' she said, lingering on her doorstep, willing him just to go away. They stood in silence, him mugging at her and fidgeting

nervously with his fingers. His sleeves were far too long, she

noticed.

'Well,' said Mabel at the same moment the Doctor said, 'Oh.'

Silence returned.

‘Please, after you,’ he insisted.

‘I was just going to say “Well”. That’s all. What were you going to say?’

‘Well,’ he said, smiling sheepishly because he’d not meant to repeat her. ‘Forgive me for saying so, but it’s not too late.’

‘Too late?’ she said. For a terrible moment she thought he meant that they could spend the evening together, that he wanted to take her to the cinema or, worse, was about to invite her out for a meal.

‘It’s never too late,’ he said. ‘Don’t be afraid. It’s simply a matter of deciding what you want to do. That’s the hard part. Then you just work out how to do it.’

Along the street, Mrs Benson and Mrs James were watching them, seemingly aware of the tension and growing horror that must have shown in Mabel’s face. Cross with them and cross with herself, she turned sharply on the Doctor.

‘That’s the problem,’ she snapped, her voice becoming shrill as she struggled not to raise it. She took a breath then continued calmly. ‘That’s always been the problem, my problem. I don’t know what I want to do. I just want to do something, to have done something, and not to have spent every moment of every day for years and years feeling so utterly useless!’

The bustle and thrum of Broadwick Street seemed so far away as they stood there on the pavement, just looking at each other. She willed the Doctor to say something or just leave her alone as she

couldn't bear to see his face so pained. He seemed so bent under the weight of her despair – and who was he to her? No one. A complete stranger. She was worried that he had no place of his own to go to, and that she'd just poured out her heart to someone so much worse off than herself. The tatty coat, the bowtie attached to his shirt with a safety pin – perhaps he really was a vagrant clutching the last threads of his dignity.

'I'll just put the bags inside,' she told him as if speaking to a tradesman now, 'then you must let me pay you for your trouble.' It had meant to be a kindness, so he wouldn't have to beg. But she knew she sounded crass and condescending. The Doctor didn't smile, nor did his expression change. He just continued to gaze at her with that hangdog face and those dark, twinkling eyes.

'Thank you,' he said, with disappointment in his voice, 'but I don't need paying.' Above them the sky rumbled darkly and the rain began to clatter down. Mrs Benson and Mrs James both scurried into their homes. Down the street suited men and children ran to find shelter.

'Oh,' said Mabel, the rain spattering cold against her face. 'But should...'

'You should do something nice for someone else,' he interrupted softly. 'It doesn't matter what it is. But it should make them smile.' He shrugged, seemed about to say something else, then turned on his heel and shambled away into the rain.

Mabel never saw the Doctor again. Two days later, while changing her mother's library books, she saw a sign saying the library was looking for volunteers. She asked the man behind the counter what

that might entail, and soon found herself working two afternoons each week. She had always found libraries to be places of quiet contemplation and Mabel enjoyed being able to get on with sorting and stacking without interruption. Her mind could wander, sometimes thinking on the gossip she'd picked up in the week, or on the events and ideas described in the books she'd also started to read.

What she especially loved, and what she came over the next few years to live for, was a particular expression on someone's face when they came to the library counter. They hadn't finished a book that was due that day, or they didn't know where to look for the archive of local papers. They were researching or checking or trying to prove something and needed a particular document. They wanted something from another library in another town and needed the right form. Whatever problem, whatever task, they all knew that she could help them.

Here, for example, was a small boy in short trousers, clutching one of John Buchan's lurid Richard Hannay books.

'Please, miss,' he said, 'I don't know this word.'

Mabel squinted at the tiny print he pointed to. 'And what's your name?' she asked.

'Malcolm Wells,' he said, offering the young woman his hand.

Theresa glowered at him, her arms still crossed over her feather boa. He sat back down behind his desk. After a moment, Theresa took the seat opposite him, feet on tiptoes to reach the floor, shapely legs bent so they looked like a number seven. She wore one of the

especially high mini-skirts which seemed to be all the rage – and weren't entirely decent.

'Do you remember me from your mother's fortieth birthday?' Malcolm asked, keen to make a connection. 'You must have been, what, twelve? Sang that song to the Prime Minister.' The girl shook her head, the beads in her long, dark hair clicking together. She might have been pretty beneath her unusual make-up. Perhaps that was part of the protest: she didn't want to be defined by the way she looked. 'Flower power' as a name made the movement sound so gentle, but Malcolm had seen hippies fighting with the police, even fighting with each other. Unlocking their unconsciousness could leave the youngsters – and those young at heart – detached from the world around them, paranoid or worse. Psychologists were only starting to come to terms with the damage being done.

Malcolm scanned the papers laid out in front of him. 'Your father doesn't want this to be too much of an ordeal,' he said. 'We go back quite some way. I suppose he told you all about our National

Service?'

'Maybe,' she said. 'I don't always listen.'

'Good,' said Malcolm, fiddling with the knot of his tie. She probably thought of him as some kind of establishment dinosaur, something she'd sworn to fight. 'We've seen a few things, me and him. So when the honourable gentleman for West Basing has a problem, he knows he can come to me. George says he's got a problem. Do you know what that is?'

'He thinks I've lost my mind,' she said levelly.

Malcolm laughed and sat back in his seat. ‘He didn’t put it quite like that, but he is a bit concerned. I said we should have a chat.’

‘Are you going to lock me up? Give me electric shocks?’

‘Why would I do that?’

Theresa unfolded her arms and reached for one of the papers on his desk. ‘This is a sectioning order under the Mental Health Act 1959. You fill that in, get Dad to sign it and I get my own padded cell.’

Gosh, thought Malcolm. They said she knew her rights – George said she rarely shut up about them. ‘All right,’ he said levelly. ‘It’s on the table, but it’s at the far end of the spectrum. There are plenty of other options, depending on this chat.’

‘So I should behave myself?’

‘Why wouldn’t you behave?’

She fluttered her long eyelashes thick with mascara. ‘Didn’t you know I was a loony?’

Malcolm smiled. ‘I’ve not yet made that diagnosis. Why don’t you tell me what you saw?’

Theresa sighed. ‘I was on the number 12 bus home, which I catch at Whitehall if I’ve been working in Dad’s office and he’s staying late. There was this guy pestering me on the lower deck so I went upstairs, leaving him to the conductor. There’s no one else up there, just the usual haze of smoke. I take a seat right at the front ’cos it’s got the best view. As we’re going over the bridge by the Houses of Parliament there’s this kind of zipping noise behind me. The bus hasn’t stopped but there’s this big guy with blond, curly hair and dressed up in groovy gear like a kind of clown. It’s like he’s just appeared behind me.’

‘You told your father he was a doctor of some sort,’ said

Malcolm.

‘That’s what he told me he was,’ she said. ‘I thought it was one of them things where they come round with a bucket wanting your

loose change. Instead he asks me where the bus is going.’

‘He could have asked the conductor when he got on.’

‘Yeah, well, I didn’t think of that when he was there. So I told

him. Dulwich, the Plough. It’s a pub, I think, though I’ve never

been that far. And he nods and strokes the cat badge on his –’ She wrinkled her nose. ‘What’s that thing called again? The flap bit on your jacket. Where you’ve got your flower.’

Malcolm glanced down at his three-piece pinstripe. ‘It’s a

carnation,’ he said. ‘And it’s called a lapel.’

‘Right. So he’s stroking this cat badge on his lapel. And then he

asks me if I’d mind moving to the other seat.’

‘He wanted to sit with you?’

‘No, nothing like that. He just asks me if I’d move. The top deck

is empty except for him and me, so I’m looking back at all the seats.

And I don’t know why, I get up and sit in the other front seat. Guess I’ve just been indoctrinated to do what people tell me.’

‘Your parents paid out a lot in fees for that indoctrination,’ said Malcolm.

‘Got their money’s worth, then,’ she said sourly. ‘So, I’m sat

there and we’re coming into St George’s Circus, just after the

bridge. And this doctor guy starts working a machine. It’s like a

transistor but with all these wires hanging out of the side. He fiddles

around and some of them spark brightly as they touch together.

There's this arc of electricity, and I start to ask him what he's doing and does he have to do it here? That's when the top deck of the bus suddenly goes electric-white.'

'What was it? Some sort of explosion?'

'Nothing like that, more like when the telly's on the blink. It's all washed out, like too much picture's coming through at once.

Anyway, the bright light fades out and the deck is full of people.

Men in suits and bowler hats. Women and their children. All sorts, rich and poor. Not all of them the kind of people you'd think would get the bus.'

'And they were all shouting and screaming.'

'Not at first. They just sat there, eyes wide open but like they

were asleep. The man in the colourful clothes is beaming at me with this smug expression. I start to ask him what he did, and maybe it's the sound of my voice that brings them to their senses. Then they all start screaming at each other.'

'I'd probably start screaming if I'd just been conjured out of thin air.'

Theresa smiled acidly at him.

'The weird thing was getting to the bus stop and there was the

army and there were ambulances waiting. They crowded aboard,

started organising people, taking them away. They've got blankets

and flasks of tea. They check people's eyes and mouths, making

sure they're steady on their feet. It's like these people were

expected.'

'And you spoke to these soldiers?'

'I tried to, but they just shoved me off. Quoted me something

about Intrusion Counter Measures and orders from Geneva. You only use that kind of force in a national emergency, which they're denying this is. But I overheard what they were saying. And there aren't any words that sound a bit like "extra terrestrial", not any I can think of.'

'Ah. Hence your recent studies.'

Theresa took a deep breath. 'I'd been working in Dad's office anyway. Knew my way around, how you send for information that's not for public sight. And he caught me writing up an information request about UFOs in London. Misuse of parliamentary resources, he called it. Turns out I was committing high treason. Which you can still be executed for.'

'Your father told you that?'

'Treason Act 1814, and never been amended,' she said. 'Before that you were burnt at the stake, if you were a woman.' She smiled at him, and Malcolm saw for the first time the beauty she'd inherited from her mother. Why was he so drawn to intelligent women? Perhaps he'd been imprinted from an early age. That nice old lady in the library when he'd been a boy. She'd always had time for him, always had answers or had helped to find them. And he'd seen, even then, that she took such pleasure in this that he'd kept asking questions. He remembered distinctly that moment he'd realised, the first diagnosis he ever made. Poor woman had been killed early on in the Blitz. She'd kindled, without ever knowing it, what had since become his whole career. Just because she'd made the time.

'What?' said Theresa, mistaking his silence for a fault in what

she'd told him. She knew her father better than he did and even he knew how hard her father tried to maintain the image of the Right Honourable Gentleman. The man would rather lock up his only daughter than face any kind of embarrassment from public scandal. He'd rather believe she had gone mad than let her ask awkward questions.

'You know your law,' said Malcolm.

Again Theresa wrinkled her nose. 'A little,' she admitted. 'It's a useful thing to know your way round when you go on demonstrations.'

'And it's based on evidence,' said Malcolm.

'Yeah,' said Theresa.

'Objective evidence. Take the story you just told me. You didn't add anything to your observations. No embellishments to make it

more exciting.'

'No!' she said, as if he'd been accusing her of something.

'Theresa, you just detailed what you saw. You gave no explanation about where these people came from or how they just appeared.'

'Trying to find that out is what got me here.'

'Indeed. But a – what did you call it? – a "loony" would have filled in all the blanks. They take the things they see or suspect and thread a story in between. A story that makes sense of what they didn't understand. It's called a coping strategy, a narrative to cling to.'

'And I didn't do that,' said Theresa, realising what he meant.

‘A long time ago,’ she said, ‘someone took a chance on me. Helped me find my way. I think I can do the same for you.’

The girl didn’t respond, just sat sulking behind the table on which they’d placed the things they’d confiscated from her. What was a teenage girl doing carrying a screwdriver? As for the other odds and ends, she might well have been going out to war.

Theresa turned to the policeman by the door. He stood smartly to attention, on his best behaviour with a magistrate in the room. She could see he had the same well-meaning competence she’d observed in many of his colleagues over time. Solid, dependable and loath to make exceptions to the system.

‘Could you leave us on our own for a moment?’ she asked him.

The policeman responded as if stung, then slowly nodded his head. He made sure to gather up the dangerous arsenal from the table and take it with him, where it would not be a temptation to the girl.

‘Right,’ said Theresa when he’d gone, ‘you’re a bright girl. Miss Birkett says you’ve great aptitude for her lessons. Though we also spoke to Mrs Parkinson.’

The girl muttered something under her breath.

‘No, I didn’t warm to her much either,’ said Theresa. The girl glanced up, surprised, and then ducked her head down once again, her hoop earrings swinging with the movement.

‘But you’re also going to be sixteen next week,’ said Theresa.

‘Petty as this may seem to you, you’ve been in here too often. They want me to consider a custodial sentence. You could be going to prison.’

The girl looked up again, this time holding her gaze with a defiant expression, just like Theresa had worn nearly two decades before when in trouble with the police. That had been another world. The kids today weren't fighting for a better life, they were just fighting. Or was that how it seemed to her and her generation? She knew how she must have seemed to the adults when she'd been in her teens: difficult, angry and frustrated with the world and her place within it. Yet her generation had also had such hope, such belief that they might change things for the better. And what had they achieved? No wonder the children of the eighties seemed so bitter.

'I'm trying to help,' she said, gently. The girl continued to glare. Maybe a short spell in prison was what these kids needed to shake them up a bit. That's what many of Theresa's peers thought, and it's what the papers were constantly clamouring for.

But Theresa knew better than to think being locked up would solve this girl's problems. What she needed was a way out of the prison of her life. She needed a new perspective, perhaps someone to take an interest in her, someone who could be a guide.

And because Theresa could see how she too had once sat on that side of the table, knew how terrified she'd been despite the bullish front, she told herself she was going to persevere. Wherever this girl ended up, Theresa would be there to stand by her.

Decision made, she smiled. 'So,' she said, 'what sort of name is "Ace"?'

What Has Happened to the

Magic of 'Doctor Who'?

VI

Gareth Roberts

John Nathan-Turner

The BBC, Producer, 'Doctor Who'

1st April 1982

Dear Mr Nathan-Turner,

Following the conclusion of the latest series of 'Doctor Who' the night before last, with the Doctor defeating the Master at Heathrow Airport, I would like to be able to write and congratulate you.

Unfortunately, for me this series has seen the magic inherent in 'Doctor Who' slide away somehow, and I will not be continuing to watch the series.

First and foremost, where are the wit and the lightness of touch that we expect from 'Doctor Who'? The new Doctor and his gaggle of young friends take everything they encounter so very seriously, often inadvertently rendering it laughable. And if the Doctor doesn't seem capable of handling the squabbles between three teenagers, how can we be expected to believe he can save the universe? He seems ineffectual at best, responding to even the slightest threat with a hyperbolic statement of non-specific doom. The previous Doctor was intelligent, witty, relaxed – a proper hero.

The style and sophistication of the previous Doctor's cool, glamorous assistants has been replaced by a dysfunctional band of brats – often so caught up in themselves and their own petty

recriminations (I'm thinking of Tegan and Adric's row on the

jungle planet when they were about to be blown sky-high!) that they barely have time to wonder at their adventures. Romana and K9

were fun!

The quirky and original ideas 'Doctor Who' used to generate as a

matter of course – the alien theft of the Mona Lisa, for example –

have been replaced by desperately familiar tropes of aliens

influencing a historical event, or a Cyberman invasion, even the

airport disaster movie. There is also a lot of pseudoscientific

bobbins spouting from the actors' mouths, tying in with a reliance on button-pushing as a way of plotting or concluding a story. How

on Earth did the Doctor defeat the Master at the close of last night's episode? I caught something about an 'inhibition factor inherent in the programming', I think. In other words, the Doctor simply

flicked a switch to defeat the Master. That is just not good enough, Mr Nathan-Turner.

In stories like the 'Creature in the Pit', or 'Androids On Tara', the Doctor used his ingenuity to defeat his enemies, and I would like to see this return. And bring back K9!

But then, even if you do, I shan't be watching 'Doctor Who' ever

again.

Mr Martin Ward, Salford, Manchester

What Has Happened to the Magic of 'Doctor Who'? continues on page 177

The Science of Magic

Michael Rees

An adventure of the Third Doctor, with Liz

The Brigadier was dead. Liz Shaw kept repeating it to herself in the dreadful hope that her mind would finally accept the truth of it. She knew he was gone, yet she kept pondering what the Brigadier would do or say in any particular situation, only to realise, with an empty feeling in her stomach, that now she would never know. The Brigadier was dead.

Since joining UNIT Liz had come to accept a lot of things that fell outside her understanding of the world, of the universe itself. But the existence of aliens paled when compared to an all-out invasion by creatures of myth and legend. There was, she thought, only so much a rational mind could cope with.

She remembered how she had laughed when the Brigadier had stormed into the Doctor's lab and announced that centaurs and ogres were approaching London. The memory of the cold stare he'd given her still made her shudder.

Even then she'd expected the Doctor to offer a rational explanation and save the day within a few hours, like somehow he always did. Within just 24 hours that hope had died. The Government and its armed forces – including UNIT – lost control of the capital, and armies of monstrous creatures that were straight out of fairy tales besieged the country's major cities.

It wasn't long before they could put a name to the mastermind behind the astonishing attacks. On the second day of the invasion the sky was filled with the image of a pale, thin woman with long silver-white hair. Everyone had seen her, all over the country. It was just one of many things that continued to defy explanation.

In a voice that echoed in their heads, the woman announced she was the Witch-Queen Karolina and that Britain now belonged to her. Any resistance would be crushed as swiftly as she had taken control. The message was brief and to the point. As suddenly as the vision appeared, it vanished, but her words lingered in the minds of everyone who'd heard them.

The last time Liz had seen the Brigadier alive had been at the port of Dover. UNIT had been co-ordinating the military, trying to slow 150 the invaders with alien technologies confiscated during previous invasions. The Doctor had warned of the foolishness of using weapons they didn't understand, but the Brigadier had silenced him, saying that desperate times called for desperate measures. The Doctor appeared unable to disagree.

The Brigadier was preparing his troops, a mixture of UNIT and the British Army. Their mission was to at least slow the advance of Karolina's hordes, giving the fleeing ships they were protecting the chance to get out of range of the flying creatures the Witch-Queen commanded. Everyone expected casualties to be high.

Liz had been shocked to hear the Doctor tell the Brigadier that he was the bravest man he'd ever known and even more shocked to see him salute. Liz had never seen the Doctor recognise the Brigadier's authority in such a blatant way. The Brigadier seemed equally taken aback but said nothing, merely nodded and led his troops to meet the approaching army. He must have known then he was going into battle to die.

The ferry voyage to Ireland, packed with evacuees, had been terrible. The crying and smell of so many people packed on to the boat did little to settle Liz's stomach. She felt alone in the crowd, the Doctor frequently absent while he checked on Bessie, his

beloved yellow roadster, which was secure in the hold.

To pass the time Liz stayed on deck and watched the other ships

and boats of the desperate convoy, each certainly as crowded as her own. It was an unusual collection of vessels, consisting of

everything from cargo ships to military carriers to pleasure boats, all bearing confused, frightened and angry refugees to Ireland.

Exiles, they were all exiles, just like the Doctor said he was. For the first time she had some understanding of his predicament. Cut

off from home, with an aching loss that threatened to be

overwhelming.

As soon as they arrived at Rosslare the news had already been

received: the Brigadier and his squad had been slain in the initial charge. The enemy had unleashed a volley of arrows that arced

through the air and sought out a warm body in which to bury

themselves. She had cried until the tears stopped coming. The

Doctor, however, hadn't reacted. Instead, he kept busy with helping to establish UNIT's makeshift base, code-named Avalon.

Every day brought news of more losses, more defeats, and more

deaths. The Irish government couldn't cope with the influx of

evacuees. Rationing was established, making hunger another reason

why tempers would flare in the refugee camps.

And then the fight was brought to them. The Irish coastline came

under assault from vessels crewed by goblins. Like green-skinned

Vikings they would attack coastal communities, rampaging and

killing, doing as much damage as possible before the army could

respond.

Even the ships patrolling the waters were vulnerable to selkies, creatures that were half human, half seal. Their grey bodies glided through the water only to clamber on to vessels, despatching unwary sailors before vanishing back into the sea.

Just as Liz had come to accept that she'd never see the England she knew ever again, she was shocked to find UNIT had a mission for her and the Doctor and, within only a month of leaving the mainland, they found themselves in a military tent in Cornwall.

When Liz had entered she had been a little self-conscious. She'd always made the effort to wear both practical and presentable clothes her entire life, but now she wore thick, itchy trousers and a woollen pullover that was several sizes too big. Rationing had made her lose weight, leaving dark shadows under her eyes that not even the last of her make-up could disguise. With the wind blowing fiercely, she was acutely aware how bushy her hair had become.

She immediately felt guilty about such petty concerns once she saw what the soldiers in Britain had endured. It always struck her how immaculate UNIT's soldiers were, clad in their beige uniforms and ties. That wasn't the case now.

To a man, everyone was covered in a layer of grime. Unshaven and in dire need of sleep, this band of men looked like they could fall down at any moment. Dirt and blood were spattered on their uniforms, many of which were ripped. Nearly all of the soldiers bore fresh wounds, hastily bandaged. If she'd had time she'd have tended to them, but she was on a mission.

Sergeant Benton was briefing the assembled group, the only officer present that she knew. He too had changed, seemingly weary and grim, with no sign of her cheerful, charming friend. He handed

out photos, each officer studying them and then passing them on.

‘These photos were taken by a RAF helicopter at 0800 hours yesterday. As you all know, we have established the invaders are led by someone called the Witch-Queen Karolina. We believe that this is her base of operations,’ Benton explained.

The Doctor frowned at the photo and passed it along to Liz. It depicted a thick forest with a fortress rising out of a clearing. Although the photo was blurred, it seemed as if the massive building was organic, grown from twisting brown vines, barbed with thorns, some several feet long.

‘The helicopter was attacked by a dragon,’ Benton continued. ‘One of our men was able to parachute to safety with these photos, but the pilot died as he distracted the monster. We will not let his 152 sacrifice be in vain.’ Benton turned his attention to the map laid out on the table in front of them all. It displayed the geography of north Cornwall, including a red mark around the small village of Altarnun, with the Thorn Fortress, as he called it, only a few miles away.

‘Our unit will proceed to the village of Altarnun where our intel indicates sixty villagers are being held. Typically, captured civilians are either used as slave labour or as food for the Witch-Queen’s army. It will be Squad A’s task to free them, and withdraw to this base, where Squad B will be waiting to ambush any pursuers. This should draw the attention of Karolina’s army, allowing the Doctor and Miss Shaw to advance, unnoticed, to this fortress. Any questions?’ Benton asked.

‘What will two people be able to do?’ asked one of the soldiers

Liz did not recognise.

‘I’ll just have a word with this Witch-Queen, and see if I can’t persuade her to go home peacefully, Private Jenkins,’ the Doctor said, quietly and with a smile.

Liz could see that only Benton seemed convinced by the Doctor’s words. The faithful soldier drew himself up to his full height, and slapped his hand on the table, getting everyone’s attention.

‘Two people have a greater chance of reaching the fortress than any squad. Out of anyone in UNIT, the Doctor and Miss Shaw here are our best chance to deal with this Witch-Queen. Now, the rest of us better get ready. Let’s go save those people. Dismissed.’

The soldiers clicked their heels and saluted before scrambling to get prepare for the raid. The Doctor approached Benton, who was rubbing his forehead.

‘I appreciate your faith in us, Sergeant. We won’t let you down,’ he said.

Benton sighed, ‘I hope so. The country is counting on us, Doctor.’ Reaching to his belt, Benton retrieved his service pistol.

‘Here, for the journey,’ he said, holding it handle-first towards the Doctor.

The Time Lord looked appalled, so Benton quickly turned to Liz.

‘Miss Shaw?’ he asked.

Liz looked at the weapon. Although she’d never fired a gun, she wanted to take it. She knew it would make her feel safer. She had read enough intelligence reports to know would happen to them if

they were discovered. She also knew the Doctor would disapprove of carrying the weapon, and somehow that mattered more.

'No, thank you, Sergeant,' Liz said, spotting that the Doctor was trying to conceal a smile. Benton simply shrugged and holstered the pistol. 'Is there any news from other countries?' Benton asked,

adding, 'The Witch-Queen is blocking radio signals. We don't get much information.'

'The US and France attempted to send a fleet two weeks ago,' Liz replied. 'They didn't get very far. Apparently this storm appeared, forcing many of the ships to turn back. According to some, the waves were fifty feet high, but some still tried to get through,' Liz said.

'So what happened? I know they didn't arrive. We could have done with some more friendly faces around here,' Benton admitted.

'Sea serpents,' the Doctor said before Liz could continue. 'Sea serpents and giant squid. It seems the Witch-Queen has a way with the denizens of the ocean. Half of the boats that battled through the waves were dragged to the seabed before they could turn back.'

Benton looked downcast. 'No help is coming, then. We really are on our own.'

'They're still there. Floating off the coast of France, just waiting for the storm to break,' Liz said, hoping to raise Benton's spirits.

'I wonder, Benton, were you able to retrieve anything from my lab? The TARDIS has some items inside it that could be very useful,' the Doctor asked.

Benton shook his head. ‘London’s a complete no-go area. I can’t

believe I’m saying this, but dragons are nesting among the towers

and the church spires, hobgoblins live in the Underground, and the streets are overgrown with plants that search out flesh. Nothing gets in or out. Nothing human.’

The Doctor was disappointed, and changed the subject. ‘Then it’s

time to be off. Good luck, sergeant. See you at the celebration party afterwards,’ he said, his cape flaring as he turned quickly towards the tent flap.

From within the tent they heard Bessie’s engine roar into life,

followed by the loud honking of its horn. Liz smiled.

‘Is he all right?’ asked Benton.

‘I don’t think any of us are. Not any more.’

Two hours later Liz was pulling a patchwork quilt around herself as they sped along a country road. The hills on either side helped

protect them from the cold in the open-top roadster.

The Doctor was happily humming to himself, tapping his fingers

on the steering wheel to a tune she didn’t know or like. Liz wasn’t sure what to make of this emergence from his depression. She could only assume that the Doctor preferred to be on the front line, risking his life rather than doing menial work in Ireland.

Taking in the landscape, Liz felt that she should feel comfortable here. This, after all, was her country, her home. Instead, all she felt 154

was apprehension and fear. This was enemy territory now. They

were the invaders.

Bessie turned a bend in the road and up ahead they saw the forest

with the Witch-Queen’s fortress rising into the heavens like some

architect’s nightmare. Soon they came to a ravine, a river running far below, with an old stone bridge crossing it. There was a bump as they

left the road and started travelling across the bridge but Liz barely noticed it. Something in the middle of the bridge had caught her attention.

Wielding a huge hammer was a minotaur.

At well over two metres tall, with a pair of twisting horns and

deep black eyes that stared at them as they approached, its

magnificence and its impossibility made Liz catch her breath. The

creature's body was covered in dark-brown hair, its hooves heavy

and echoing on the bridge, and a pair of large, strong hands gripped the shaft of his hammer. His head was entirely bovine, a long, pink tongue thrashing in its mouth as it suddenly bellowed at them.

'Doctor!' Liz cried as the time-traveller forced Bessie to

accelerate.

But the minotaur stood its ground and lifted its hammer aloft. Its nostrils flared as it snorted. Liz's nails dug into the dashboard as she waited for the inevitable.

'I fear this chap is a little bull-headed, Liz! When I say jump,

jump!' said the Doctor, rising from his seat.

'Jump!' he shouted and they leapt out of either side of the

speeding vehicle.

Liz hit the ground hard, rolling as best she could, and came to a

stop pressed against the low wall of the bridge. She quickly checked herself. Nothing broken, but she would have a few bruises – if she survived the day.

Looking up she saw Bessie hurtle towards the minotaur. With

incredible timing, the minotaur brought the hammer down on

Bessie's bonnet. The front of the car crumpled, its forward wheels popping off, and the vehicle flipped over the beast, landing behind it with a terrible crunch. The minotaur flexed its muscles in triumph and

let out a roar of victory.

The Doctor's firm hand helped Liz to her feet and he guided her back towards the way they came. Suddenly he stopped. Crouching down, they saw five centaurs galloping down the road towards them. Liz would have been amazed if she hadn't been so terrified, and recalled that intelligence reports said the Witch-Queen used centaurs as patrols, presumably because they were fast, excellent trackers. Bessie's journey through the countryside had obviously not gone unnoticed.

155

Behind them the minotaur advanced, lifting his hammer. The Doctor gripped her arm, and pulled Liz into the centre of the road.

The flight or fight instinct was trying to take over, but the Doctor's firm grip prevented her from doing either. Trying to trust that the Doctor knew what he was doing, Liz watched the enemy surround them.

The Doctor glanced up and then calmly said, 'At the risk of repeating myself, jump!'

Before she could react the Doctor had led her to the edge of the bridge. If it had been anyone else Liz would have resisted, but she knew she could make a leap of faith for him.

In one swift movement they were over the wall and plummeting towards the river far below. Every muscle in her body tensed, fear preventing any sound from escaping from her mouth. Had suicide really been the better option?

There was a blur of green and a wave of pain passed through Liz

as she landed on something hard and scaly. She just had time to take in that they had landed on the back of a dragon, swooping beneath

the bridge, before she felt herself slipping.

‘I’ve got you!’ cried the Doctor, grabbing her hand and pulling

her up. The dragon’s great wings beat the air around them, carrying them higher into the sky. Its long neck turned and the great lizard opened its mouth in anger, and there was a smell of sulphur that

almost overpowered Liz. ‘Don’t mind us,’ the Doctor beamed to the

dragon. ‘We’re just catching a lift.’

The Doctor suddenly started to make a remarkable sound, a

mixture of singing and whistling. Unbelievably, the dragon was

calmed by this, and returned its attention to flying.

‘What on Earth did you just do?’ Liz cried out clinging to the

Doctor’s back.

‘It’s an old lullaby I learnt from a reptilian race quite some time ago. I thought our scaly friend might appreciate it.’ The Doctor

patted the dragon on its neck. ‘You can set us down there, old

chap.’

Gently, incredibly, the dragon descended towards a clearing in

the forest

‘This is all utterly impossible!’ Liz half-shouted and half-laughed as the air rushed past them.

‘Impossible? What’s impossible?’ the Doctor asked later, as they sat quietly near the fire, Liz rearranging her drying clothes.

Liz paused before replying. ‘Oh, just about everything!’ she said

crossly, pulling the Doctor’s cape around her to protect her

modesty. ‘Quite aside from all the monsters we’ve encountered, it

was only supposed to be a couple of miles to this fortress, but we've been walking for hours.'

'I'd hazard that we're approaching a dimensional beachhead of some kind. The Witch-Queen's fortress is just the tip of another reality that has different physical laws to ours. Temporal and spatial distortions shouldn't be a surprise. Lucky for us that we found some friendly wood sprites.'

'They were trying to drown me – and they would have if you hadn't bribed them with that crystal!'

Ah, the Gem of Goroanas. Never the same colour twice. A shame to give that up. It was Susan's,' he said sadly.

Liz's attention was caught by a glimpse of tiny figures darting between the trees, carried aloft by shimmering gossamer wings. She scowled at them, and then heard them laugh at her.

'Those pixies are impossible as well. A humanoid body that small would be unable to fill its lungs with enough air to survive. And those butterfly wings cannot possibly support their weight,' Liz said, getting herself worked up.

'The fact that they do obviously proves that it is possible, doesn't it? My dear Liz, I don't like the word impossible because the moment I hear people using it I know they are closing their minds to the possible. Here, your clothes are dry,' the Doctor said, passing her garments with a flourish.

'Then how, Doctor? I'm a scientist, a rationalist I spend my whole life trying to understand how the universe works, and then everything I believe in is taken away. Aliens I can understand, even what you've told me about time travel I can just about fathom. But

dragons? Unicorns? Witch-Queens who make fortresses appear by magic? Where do I begin to place those things in a rational world?' said Liz, dressing quickly while the Doctor turned his back.

She saw the Doctor's shoulders slump, his bravado gone.

'There is a science to this,' he insisted, warming his hands by the fire. 'We might not be able to understand it, but there must be rules. We only have to learn what they are.'

'We? Then you don't know how this is possible any more than I do! Thank goodness! I was feeling like the class dunce,' said Liz with a chuckle.

The Doctor turned away from the fire with a broad grin.

'I know. Isn't it wonderful? If we can comprehend magic then there's no limit to what we could do. I could be free to travel in time again with a snap of my fingers, overthrow dictators with six arcane words. I could even...'

The Doctor fell silent and turned back to the fire. Liz took a moment before saying, 'You can't be thinking you could bring back

the Brigadier. Raising the dead is impossible.'

'I don't believe that,' the Doctor said quietly, his shadow cast long by the light of the fire.

The Witch-Queen Karolina's presence dominated her throne room. Even surrounded by horned demons, golden-winged griffons, slime-dripping goblins and ironclad ogres, it was the Witch-Queen who drew Liz's attention.

Tall and pale, Karolina's skin was like sculpted marble, both in

colour and perfection. Her eyes were completely black, no iris or pupil to be seen. Her lips were painted blue and thin, pulled tight across her face. Karolina's long hair reached the floor, and shone with a white light.

She wore a long, grey robe that looked like spiders' webs, but which ended in jagged tips like ice. Held tightly in her right hand was a crystal staff, glowing with a shimmering blue light, and a shaft that came to a sharp point.

The Witch-Queen looked down on her prisoners from her throne made of bone. A sightless skull sat like a macabre crown at the top of the chair. Liz knew there were frequent reports of her armies removing the bodies of British soldiers from the battlefield. She prayed that the Brigadier had not suffered the indignity of being turned into grim furniture.

Liz felt herself shrinking into insignificance next to this terrifying woman, like a shadow next to a flame. The one thing that prevented her from cowering on the floor was the Doctor's presence. Tall, unbowed and unafraid, he held his head high in defiance.

Karolina pointed her staff at the Doctor, then Liz. 'You dare enter my fortress,' she hissed. 'You dare to strike down my warriors and now you dare to invade my court?'

Shaking with fury, she stepped down from her throne, stabbing the ground with the staff as she walked. Each strike chipped away at the floor's mosaic, depicting the Witch-Queen's terrible beauty.

'To be fair, madam, your warriors did strike first. I really couldn't allow them to prevent me from seeking an audience. I am the Doctor and this is my assistant, Dr Elizabeth Shaw. I have an important message for you,' the Doctor said, placing his hands on his hips.

‘Ah, your leaders have finally realised your insolent rebellions are futile and despatched you to formally announce their surrender.’

‘No, Your Highness. I have come here to ask you to leave while you still can,’ the Doctor said boldly.

An agonising silence filled the room before it was broken by the Witch-Queen throwing back her head and letting loose a terrible

laugh. Her court followed suit, causing Liz’s ears to ache.

‘Kill them,’ she ordered, and turned back to her throne.

Swords were drawn and claws were extended. Liz stepped closer to the Doctor as death from a strange group of creatures approached from every direction.

‘Wait! I challenge you to a duel, Witch-Queen Karolina. You and I in a battle to first blood. Unless you’re afraid to show your minions how weak you truly are,’ the Doctor called, stepping in front of Liz to protect her.

‘You must dearly wish for death at my hand, Doctor,’ Karolina replied, turning to face her challenger. ‘What possible reason could I have for lowering myself to such a menial task?’

‘If you defeat me I can arrange for these lands to be made yours with no further resistance. What is more, I can ensure your kingdom will be protected from interference by the powers bestowed upon me by the Time Lords.’

‘Doctor! You can’t!’ Liz was appalled, but the Doctor half-raised his palm to silence her.

Karolina was intrigued. ‘If I take you at your word, what would

you wish in return?'

The Doctor hesitated, daring himself to give voice to the thought that had appeared once Benton had told him of their mission.

'If I win, you and your army must return from wherever you came, and,' the Doctor paused, 'you must restore to life the man known as Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart. Is that within your power?'

'It is,' the Witch-Queen said, a subtle, cruel smile playing across her lips.

Liz shook her head in disbelief: the Doctor had given into temptation, one that may just have cost them their country.

'Very well, Doctor. I accept your challenge, but this shall not be to first blood but to the death! Lightning, strike!' the Witch-Queen cried, thrusting forward her crystal staff.

A blast of electricity leapt directly towards the Doctor. He stepped to one side, swinging Liz out of the way. Fragments exploded from the stone floor. The Doctor deflected them easily with his cape.

Liz tried to hide behind a pillar while the Doctor advanced onto the circular mosaic in front of the throne. From her vantage point she could watch the conflict while shielding herself, and keep away from the baying creatures that lined the room.

'Is that the best you can do?' the Doctor asked, flicking his cape back to provide his arms with as much freedom as possible.

The Witch-Queen darted forward, swinging the staff as a weapon.

The Doctor casually dodged out of the way, bringing up his sonic

screwdriver. His fingers played over its surface, before pushing a central cog upwards.

Liz had to cover her ears as the small instrument emitted a

piercing screech. The Witch-Queen was similarly affected, her teeth clenched with pain, one hand clamped to the side of her head, she

doubled over. She supported herself with her crystal staff', her hand refusing to let go.

'Your wand won't save you, Doctor. It fails you, turning to dust!'

the Witch-Queen shouted over the noise.

Her crystal staff flared with light and the sonic disturbance ended.

The Doctor was taken by surprise as the sonic screwdriver

disintegrated in his hand. The shock cost him greatly. The Witch-

Queen used the rounded end of the staff to strike him in the chest, knocking him to the floor.

'I've got a few more tricks up my sleeves, Your Highness,' he

said, searching through his pockets.

The Doctor revealed three small capsules that he hurled at the

Witch-Queen's feet. They split instantly enveloping her in a foul

gas. Liz had to cover her nose and mouth with her jumper to block

out the stench. She couldn't help but smile. Only the Doctor could bring stink bombs to a duel.

'Let the wind,' Karolina gasped between gagging coughs, 'let the

wind claim you!'

A furious wind rose up, swirling the smoke directly at the Doctor.

He turned green as his own weapon was turned against him.

Scrambling to his feet, the Doctor dashed towards the throne,

seeking higher ground.

‘Not so fast, Doctor! Chains imprison you!’ the Witch-Queen bellowed, her staff glowing brighter with every word.

The Doctor leapt into the air as, beneath him, his shadow uncoiled, becoming several lengths of black chain that rose like serpents. Wrapping themselves around his legs, he was dragged to the ground with a crash. He struggled to sit up as the chains continued to grow, getting larger, heavier, and spreading further around his body.

‘And so it ends, Doctor. You shall be an example to anyone who would question my power.’ Karolina raised her staff so its sharp edge pointed at the Doctor’s neck.

‘Stop thinking like a frightened girl and start thinking like a scientist,’ Liz whispered to herself.

Ignoring the thumping of her heart, she stepped out from behind the pillar and, just as Karolina was about to deliver the fatal blow, shouted, ‘This is impossible!’

The Witch-Queen paused, then turned towards Liz. ‘What did you say?’

‘I said, this is impossible!’

Karolina had all but forgotten Liz’s presence, as had the rest of her court. Now every single eye was on her, human and otherwise. Even the Doctor seemed surprised, if relieved.

‘This is impossible,’ Liz repeated in a whisper.

‘You doubt my magic?’ The Witch-Queen bared a mouth full of

pointed teeth.

‘Of course!’ cried Liz, boldly, realising that nothing she said would save her, but she would still have her say. ‘Only a child believes in magic, and I am not a child. You might have fooled others with your tricks, impressive as they are. But you won’t fool me.’

The Witch-Queen hissed as if she’d just heard the foulest of curses.

‘Yes. I observe cause and effect, formulate theories that support the evidence to hand. I’m a scientist who ignores the impossible and keeps investigating until the truth is revealed,’ Liz declared, walking purposefully towards Karolina.

‘These words are heresy!’

‘It is impossible for matter to be created from nothing. It is impossible for you to summon electricity or wind with just a word. Therefore, I postulate that your crystal staff hypnotises your audience into believing what you say. It’s a trick. It’s a sham,’ Liz said, her eyes never leaving Karolina’s.

‘You will die for saying such a thing,’ Karolina said, taking a step back. But it was too late. Liz was face to face with the Witch-Queen and she placed her hand on the crystal staff. With a calmness she never knew she had she simply said, ‘You, lady, are a fraud. There is no such thing as magic.’

The staff glowed brighter and brighter, forcing everyone in the throne room to close their eyes. When the light finally diminished, Liz dared to open her eyes and discovered the court had vanished and the fortress with it. Instead the Doctor, Liz and Karolina stood in a forest clearing.

Karolina looked around and screamed as she found herself

dressed in rags, her hair unkempt, long and greasy. She looked at her arms that were marred by bruises, scratches and blemishes.

The Doctor helped Liz to her feet, removing the vines hanging from her legs and arms. When they were both on their feet she passed him the crystal staff that no longer glowed. Instead, it appeared to be utterly ordinary.

'Through here,' came a familiar voice from the nearby trees. 'I've found them.' 161

Liz's heart skipped a beat as the Brigadier stepped into the clearing, his service pistol drawn. Although his uniform was tattered and dirty, his moustache was still impeccable. He was followed by a number of UNIT soldiers.

'Brigadier! We thought you were dead!' the Doctor said, vigorously shaking the soldier's hand.

'Yes, a nasty but useful little rumour. "Dead" men can't be seen,' the Brigadier said. 'You men, take her into custody.' He indicated the weeping woman on the ground.

'Careful,' Liz warned. 'She might be dangerous.'

'I doubt that very much, Miss Shaw. Her real name is Caroline Brown. An escaped mental patient who discovered a crystal staff that made people believe whatever she told them. She only had to break into a television studio to make the whole country believe her tales of invading dragons and goblins,' the Brigadier said, tucking his gun away.

'You seem awfully well informed,' said the Doctor, his eyes narrowing.

‘It took a while to work out, but when most people ignore you because they think you’re dead you find you have a lot of time on your hands to put things together. We “dead” men could see each other and banded together. We’d have dealt with her ourselves but we couldn’t see her armies, so we didn’t have a blessed clue where she was. We’ve been following you since you arrived in Cornwall, hoping you’d lead us to her.’

‘The whole time?’ Liz asked, suddenly remembering her various predicaments on their journey, in particular being drenched by wood pixies.

The Brigadier coughed to cover his embarrassment and rubbed his moustache. ‘Well, you did give us the slip once or twice.’

The Doctor laughed. ‘Never mind that. May I be the first to welcome you back to the land of the living!’

The Brigadier raised his eyebrows. In that case, let me be the first welcome you both back to reality. Now, let’s get you to your infernal TARDIS, and get back to work. Defending this country from real aliens.’

It took a day to reach London and UNIT HQ. The Doctor’s lab was untouched, if a little dusty. To Liz, everything seemed extra real. The word that the invasion was over went out immediately and evacuees were on their way home. They would find their houses untouched, and they would be reunited with those they thought they’d lost. Everyone was all too happy to believe that they had

been tricked into taking a holiday in Ireland and were ready to move on with their lives.

The Doctor had surprised Liz by ignoring the TARDIS when they

got back. Instead, he spent hours checking Bessie, which he insisted be brought into his work area. He was overjoyed to find it

unharmed, perhaps more so than finding out the Brigadier was

alive. Liz watched him, taking in the stark contrast of the mundane lab with the extraordinary man she worked with.

Beside her, on the bench, were the results on the crystal staff. She tried not to look at them too much but found herself going over the infuriating results again and again.

Every test they ran showed the staff held no extra terrestrial

properties, no advanced technology. It wasn't even crystal, just

ordinary glass. Similarly, examinations of Caroline had shown she

was an ordinary woman in her forties. Liz had hoped to discover

she was an alien or maybe had an enlarged brain possessing

telepathic abilities. Yet there was no indication she could hypnotise one person let alone a whole country.

Liz's hypnosis hypothesis was unravelling at increasing speed

without hard supporting evidence. She'd hoped the Brigadier, who

had appeared in the forest clearing with so much corroborative

information at just the right moment, would again give her the data she needed.

She'd spent nearly an hour trying to establish exactly what he had been doing during the period he had been reported dead but all he'd been able to do was repeat what he had told her earlier, word for

word. When she had pressed him, asking for such details as what

he'd eaten, where he'd gone or even what the weather had been like he had drawn a blank, become frustrated and said he had more

important things to do than reminisce.

All of which pointed to one rather uncomfortable conclusion.

‘There we are. Not a scratch,’ the Doctor announced after he had

finished polishing Bessie’s yellow paintwork ‘It’s as if nothing ever happened, which I suppose is true.’

He turned to find Liz staring at him, cradling a steaming cup of

tea in her hand. The Doctor’s smile faded, as he noted the subtle

downturn in the corners of her mouth.

‘Something troubling you, Liz? I’d have thought you would have

been happy. Science won out over superstition.’ He stepped towards the workbench she was leaning against.

‘But did it, Doctor? I only noted that Karolina, I mean Caroline,

said what she wanted to happen before it occurred. It appeared the staff imposed her will on reality and I thought, hoped, that I could do the same.’

The Doctor was looking at her with concern.

‘Doctor, what if I used magic to make it so that magic didn’t

exist?’

The Doctor took a moment to consider her question, eventually

placing his hands on her arms in a gentle embrace and smiled.

‘Anything is possible.’

‘Magic existed before. It will exist again,’ Karolina said, her words slurred.

They had told her that her name was Caroline but she knew the

truth. Names had power and, despite everything, she clung to that.

She refused to let go of the world she knew, refused to accept that her

world was a fantasy. The alternative was too horrific to contemplate.

How could this dull, grey world be reality? Sad, dreary lives under a pale sun, living in boxes until they died. A lonely planet shared only by humans, slaughtering each other and the unthinking animal kingdom for no other reason than it passed the time.

They could never grasp what she had lost, what they had taken from her. The people of this world had never smelt the sickly sweet perfume of the death roses growing from graves in the ancient cemetery of the First Gods. They'd never stood in the snowy lands of Vostok, watching the dragons dance in the cold air above, their scales changing like the colours of a rainbow. Not one of them would ever have their heart broken by the lament of a goblin bard or taste the exquisite cuisine of the minotaur clans.

Even without her power Karolina knew that she frightened the small, petty men who had imprisoned her. Titles like 'doctor' or 'professor' were vain attempts at giving themselves importance and meaning, but they were wasted on the Witch-Queen. Her eyes, which had seen such wonders and glory, saw how mundane their lives were and burned this knowledge into their souls.

So they told her she was mad. They told her she was not a Witch-Queen. They told her she was like them. They told her she must be small and ordinary. When she refused to agree to their grey lives, they gave her pills to diminish the light in her mind. They kept her locked away so she would not make them see that they were insubstantial shades. Garments held her arms against her body with straps that prevented her from casting even the simplest curse.

'Magic existed before. It will exist again,' Karolina muttered her

mantra as she did every day, her eyes fixed on the small square of dim light on the floor, cast from the barred window above her head.

Every day she watched it fade in and out, never reaching a true

brightness.

164

One day a shadow passed across the light, nothing more than a

dot. A flutter of wings danced around her head and Karolina, in her drugged state, thought a small beetle had entered. For a second she was convinced she saw its black shell and spindly legs out of the

corner of her vision. Then her visitor flew in front of her. The

creature's tiny wings shone like stained glass as it hovered in the air. Karolina smiled and laughed, feeling joy for the first time in too long.

The wood sprite, dressed in clothes made of leaves, grinned in

return, and bowed.

'Rebellious to the end,' Karolina observed. 'Even the magic of

the staff could not undo your contrary nature.'

Ignoring the drool that dripped down her chin, Karolina watched

the sprite dance and she began to plot. This was but the first step.

The sprite was only the first to rejoin her court. She would bide her time and gather her strength. One day soon she would free herself, and on that day she'd have her revenge against the woman who had

done this to her.

On that day, Liz Shaw was dead.

165

Hello Goodbye

Jim Sangster

An adventure of the Fourth Doctor, with Sarah Jane and Harry

Surgeon Lieutenant Harry Sullivan sat at his desk with his feet up and his fingers interlocked, cradling the back of his head. It was at times like this that he appreciated having a door to the sickbay. He liked having people around and enjoyed the banter in the mess hall, but it was good, just occasionally, to close the door and let his mind wander. This afternoon, he'd decided, he'd calculate how long it

might take to walk to China by measuring the length of the sickbay using just his footsteps end to end.

Harry stopped that train of thought as he realized he was actually bored – in UNIT! He was grateful for the calm before the inevitable storm but ever since the embarrassment of Operation Douglas

things had been too quiet. There were no soldiers to patch up, no

goo to analyse, and no opportunities to feel involved. All this

inactivity was making him feel restless. He got out of his chair and stretched, wondering if he might slip away early for an hour at the gym. He was in good shape, a legacy of his rugger days, but there

was the onset of a slight spread around his waist that could do with some attention.

As his mind wandered he didn't hear the sickbay door open, but

he was instantly aware of another presence in the room. He fell

backwards, breaking his fall comfortably and flipping into a judo

roll that left him standing in a perfect defensive stance.., as the newcomer broke into applause.

'Oh, well done, Harry! That was impressive! What do you call

that?'

'Um, *ushiro ukemi*, I think.' Harry blushed as Sarah Jane Smith beamed back at him.

'Whatever it is, I hope it's not catching. You all right down

there?'

'Fine, thank you, Sarah,' Harry replied, moving to a more

comfortable position. ‘What brings you back here?’

‘Oh, the Doctor got another of those calls on his space-time telegraph doo-dah. He’s in with the Brigadier now.’

Harry knew two things immediately: that the Brigadier had begun

an operation without involving him and that the Doctor would undoubtedly be in a horrendous mood.

A short walk down the pastel-blue corridor was the less surgical wooden-panelled office of UNIT’s commanding officer, Brigadier Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart. A tall, imposing figure, he sported a neat moustache and his hair was at the regulation length for operatives involved in matters of security. It wouldn’t be done to be posing as a civilian with a short-back-and-sides from a pair of army clippers. He usually had the demeanour of a man who was used to being obeyed. His men looked up to him because he never sent them into danger without leading from the front. They would do anything for him, even lay down their lives in the knowledge that he had the best interests of Great Britain and the world at heart. He commanded their respect with ease.

Today, there was one exception.

The lights were off in the office, and the blinds were dawn. The Brigadier’s face was lit only by the glare of a projector beaming a map of the world against a dull screen. The briefing was designed to prepare the men for imminent attack. Despite recent evidence to the contrary, experience told the Brigadier that an alien invasion could come at any moment, and in any form. But he noticed that some of the men were growing distracted by the lanky figure sat in a swivel-chair with a felt hat over his face. A dangerously long scarf was

draped over his back like a woollen Rapunzel and his feet were propped lazily on the corner of the Brigadier's desk. Distracted men lead to mistakes. Mistakes led to casualties; ergo something had to be done. The men were dismissed, leaving the Brigadier and the Doctor alone.

'Doctor, these briefings are as much for your benefit as for ours,' the Brigadier began as he drew back the curtains, flooding the room with sunlight. 'The threat of alien invasion is a constant one and it's the job of the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce to –'

A deep, resonant voice emerged from beneath the hat. 'Is this going to go on for much longer, Brigadier?' it asked. 'Only, I have things to do.'

'This briefing is of the utmost importance, Doctor.'

'Nonsense! This briefing is a training exercise. Nothing more. You and I both know that, Brigadier. You haven't had any genuine alien invaders on your doorstep for weeks now. Have you?'

'Your job as UNIT's scientific –' the Brigadier attempted to continue, but the Doctor interrupted once again.

'My job?' The Doctor bolted upright from the chair, scattering dried flakes of grey soil from the soles of his shoes. 'My job? You 167 talk as if this is a nine-to-five, Alistair. With a pension. And luncheon vouchers.'

'And yet you happily make free with every resource we have available, Doctor. Each item of equipment, which has always turned up on time, without complaint or query – paid for by Her Majesty's Government.'

The Doctor chewed his thumbnail. 'That was different. I was an exile back then. I had no choice. I can come and go as I please

now.'

'We never did send you a bill for that wretched car of yours, did we? Either of them, in fact. It's a wonder Customs and Excise hasn't tried to trace you. I'm sure they would be classed as taxable benefits.'

'Is that a threat?' The Doctor looked appalled.

'You might see it that way, Doctor. I prefer to think of it as protecting our investment. We need you where we can keep an eye on you. Can't have you gallivanting off around the universe where you might get hurt.'

As he walked past his desk to the window, the Brigadier scooped up the dust that had fallen from the Doctor's shoes and poured it neatly into the waste paper bin. The Doctor, meanwhile, was staring into space, his mouth a perfect downward curve. Was this the future the Brigadier had in mind for him – a wage slave?

Sarah looked well. Her hair had grown since Harry had last seen her and it suited her. She was almost the sort of girl he'd find attractive if she weren't so darned independent. It could often make her a bit spiky, difficult to talk to. For all his admiration of the girl, there was something about her that always made him feel tense around the back of his neck.

'Nearly forgot,' she said. 'Got you a present.'

'Really? Whatever for?'

She handed him a small box wrapped in tissue paper. 'Oh, I don't know. I must have missed a birthday or two since I last saw you.'

Harry fumbled with the paper, holding the box in one hand as he clumsily flipped open the lid. Inside the box was a lump of rock. It was difficult to hide his disappointment.

‘Oh, I say, that... I mean, it’s, er...’

‘Moon rock.’

‘What?’

‘Moon rock.’

‘Which moon?’ Harry asked, and Sarah smiled: he was learning.

‘From your actual moon. That one,’ she pointed skywards, ‘up

there.’

168

Harry blushed. He was struggling to find the right words to say

because he now realised just how perfect a gift it was. He knew

exactly where he’d put it too – on his desk, right next to the lump of iron pyrite he’d pocketed on his brief excursion to Voga. Only a

fool like him could go to a planet famed across the universe for its gold and come back with a booby prize. But this! This was the real thing!

‘Thank you, Sarah,’ said Harry. ‘This means an awful lot to me,

you know.’

‘Thought it might.’ Sarah wondered if he was going to get all

soppy over a lump of rock and decided to change the subject. ‘So,

what’s been happening around here then? Caught any aliens with

their tentacles on the crown jewels lately?’

‘Not quite, no.’

‘Oh, come on, Harry, I signed the Official Secrets Act years ago!

You don’t need to clam up on my account.’

‘No, really. It’s been jolly quiet. The Brigadier has even talked of Geneva scaling things back. Something about restructures and

centralising things.'

'It can't be that bad, surely? I mean, it's not as if there's a

shortage of green, scaly aliens out there.'

'We've been busy enough, I suppose – even without the Doctor

around. But in the last few months there's been, well, nothing. The last big operation we had was in Dorset. Reports of aliens

marauding around the clay pits. Turned out to be some actors

making a TV show for the BBC. Funny coincidence, I went to

school with the director.'

'So you've had nothing at all for, what, two months?'

'Two months to the day, actually. To tell the truth, it's been, well, it's been a bit dull.' Harry shrugged. 'Never mind. Probably for the best. Tell me where you've been since we last saw you. You must

have been up to some shenanigans with the Doctor.'

Sarah knew the dangers of making out that her travels with the

Doctor were just a series of exotic holidays, just as she could see the hope in Harry's eyes that told her he didn't need to hear about the torture, the hardship, the loss of life that always surrounded life in the TARDIS. Harry was what he always was – a *Boy's Own* fan who wanted to play at being James Bond.

So she told him the bits that sounded fun: landing on the moon

and discovering a group of giant slugs that wanted to set up a

colony. Then how the Doctor had talked them into moving to one of

Jupiter's moons instead, where they would remain undiscovered for

at least few hundred years, and how they wouldn't like humans

anyway because of their high salt content, which the Doctor blamed

on the rise of ready meals.

But she left out the bit about the four American astronauts who had died, and how the Doctor had used the slugs' technology to build a beacon to warn all alien invaders away from the area for about 20 years. The beacon, he said, would leave him free to explore without having to pop back and check up on the Earth all the time – and which she now realised was certainly responsible for UNIT's 'dry spell'.

'You ever regret not coming with us, Harry?' asked Sarah, changing the subject. Harry frowned.

'I did for a while. Even by Intercity, it's a long journey back from Loch Ness to King's Cross. But it gave me time to think. Have you ever been to the Highlands, Sarah?'

'Um, I was there with you. Zygons and Skarasen, remember?'

'Yes, of course. What I mean is, have you ever been there and not been distracted by alien invaders?' Sarah admitted she hadn't. 'I suddenly realised I'd been to all these amazing places and never looked up. Not once. I'd spent all my time checking to see where the danger points might be, where an attack might come from, where the escape routes were. Clambering in ventilation shafts under an alien planet and never even seeing the skies above. How many moons does Skaro have, Sarah?'

'No idea,' she replied.

'Me neither. The Doctor and you took me to other worlds. I walked on alien soil and breathed alien air, and what do I have to show for it? There's never time to ask for directions to the gift shop, is there?'

‘We’re usually a bit busy for that.’

‘I know, I know,’ mollified Harry, catching a sharp tone in

Sarah’s reply. ‘But when I got back here, I realised Earth is one

planet I do have the time to explore. First bit of leave I got, I went back to Scotland and walked around the Highlands. My neck was

sore from looking up, I can tell you. They have mountains up there that look just as alien as the wastelands of Skaro. The difference is, I had time to enjoy them.’

Sarah knew he had a point. It was true, they never seemed to have

time to sit down and appreciate what a unique experience travelling with the Doctor really was. The only time she’d done any

sightseeing of note was bearing witness to one of the Wonders of

the Universe crumbling to dust Even then she’d forgotten to pack

her camera.

‘It’s not as if we could send anyone a postcard, is it? I mean, just imagine the stamps.’

Harry smiled. ‘The thing is, I realised that I just wasn’t suited to 170

such a random life. I’m used to a more regimented existence –

literally. I follow orders. Have done ever since my mother handed

me over to the Sea Scouts as a boy. I have to admit that adventuring with space aliens was all a bit much, especially with the Doctor as he is.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well, he’s a bit odd, don’t you think?’

‘He’s more than that, Harry,’ said Sarah defensively. ‘He’s also

brilliant.’

‘And so are you, Sarah. Honestly, I don’t know how you do it.

Frankly, the thought of getting in that police box of his again fills me

with dread.'

'You're being silly, Harry. Are you telling me you wouldn't jump at the chance for a quick hop around the galaxy if the Doctor asked you right now?'

Before Harry could answer, the door to his office flew open and an explosion of wool and tweed strode in. The Doctor's face was more furious than Sarah or Harry had ever thought a face could be.

'The arrogance of the man!' the Doctor roared. 'Twaddle! Flapdoodle! Claptrap!' Sarah worried that the Brigadier might hear, until she realised that was probably the point.

'What happened?' Harry asked.

'Your commanding officer,' the Doctor shouted, 'is a nincompoop! A buffoon! A warmonger full of his own self-importance. He means nothing! Nothing, as far as this universe is concerned. I don't know why I bother!'

'Doctor, you don't mean that,' Sarah said. 'You and the Brigadier have been friends for years!'

'And what good has it done him, eh? Still treating me like an underling. That's the thanks I get for being friends with a human!'

'Oh, thanks,' muttered Sarah, shooting Harry a look that begged him to say something. But Harry was looking at the floor intently, like a man desperately wanting to be invisible.

'What's he done this time? Rationed your jelly babies?' she tried.

The Doctor's expression told Sarah this wasn't the right time for jokes. When he spoke, it was with a grave sadness that chilled the two humans to the core.

‘He’s refused to accept my resignation from UNIT.’

Sarah mimed to Harry to keep the Doctor talking as she slipped out of the office and went to find the Brigadier.

The head of the UK branch of UNIT perched against his desk. It had only been a few months since he and the Doctor had last seen one another. As the afternoon sunlight dimmed through his office

windows, Sarah noticed how much older he seemed. A little more grey at the temples, a tiredness behind the eyes. Here was a man who held the respect of whole battalions of soldiers and world leaders. He was solidly ‘old school’ yet she’d always liked his stuffiness, the oh-so-English stiff-upper-lipness that she teased him about. She’d seen him take on adversaries few other military men could even comprehend. Why did he have such an air of defeat about him now?

‘I just can’t take to him,’ the Brigadier confessed, answering the question Sarah had silently asked herself. ‘I’ve tried, believe me, but he’s not the man I know, not one of them.’

‘But he is the same man, Brigadier. Honestly! He makes the same lousy jokes and, oh, the namedropping! You name ’em, he’s dined with ’em. There can’t be more than two people in the universe who’ve met Napoleon, Henry VIII and Churchill – all on the same weekend!’

That made the Brig smile. Neither of them quite knew if the Doctor’s regular boasts of social occasions past were just hot air, a means of distracting them from dire situations or genuine events.

And it struck them as odd that, for a man who claimed to be so well acquainted, history seemed to have completely forgotten him.

'It's not easy, this life,' the Brigadier sighed. 'There aren't many people who can understand the pressures, the responsibility of

keeping what we do a secret. Thanks to Geneva and Her Majesty's

Government, I have to slap D-notices on even the most routine

investigations. Even the thirty-year rule doesn't cover most of my work. If I do my job well, no one will ever know I existed.'

Sarah made to protest, but stopped herself. As an experienced

journalist, she could recognise the signs of someone who just wants someone to listen to them. Let him speak, she thought. He simply

needs to offload.

'He's always been impossible, and we both know it. Right from

the start, back when UNIT was in its infancy, I was the one who had to adopt him, you know. We had to make sure we got to him before

he fell into the hands of any foreign powers. He was just too

valuable a resource. It's not every day you get to employ an alien.

"By any means necessary," the order said.'

The Brigadier shot Sarah a look.

'I know that, technically, speaking loosely like this to a journalist could seriously damage my pension.'

'Your secret's safe with me, Brigadier. For thirty years, at least.'

Sarah gave him a gentle grin.

'I'm sure I can trust you, Miss Smith. And not just because I have to.'

The Brigadier stood and walked to the window. Down on the

parade ground, Osgood was struggling with a hosepipe. For a

second, he reminded him of the Doctor, once upon a long ago, when his life was in danger because of something as ridiculous as a telephone cable. Was it nostalgia he was feeling, or just self-pity?

'He never thanks you for saving his life. Ever noticed that? We risk everything for him, often trusting him even when all common sense tells us to dismiss him as a crank. But we're the people who pull him out of danger time and time again.'

'Oh, I know. If you manage to save the day and avert universal disaster, he'll only claim it was down to him all along.' Sarah paused. 'He still does that.'

'I've seen them all, I think. Every few years or so, another one pops up and we just have to fall in line and accept a complete stranger as the man we knew before.' The Brigadier turned away from the window and looked Sarah in the eyes. The effect was unsettling. 'This, this man, he's not like any of them. He's too strange a stranger. If this is how he's going to be from now on, I might as well sit it out until the next one comes along. Lord knows, he changes his face almost as often as his companions.' The Brigadier winced, realising too late what he'd just said. 'I'm sorry, Miss Smith. That was uncalled for.'

'Don't worry about me. I know there've been other companions. Lots of them. And there'll be more after we're out of the picture. But the point is, he needs us.'

'I wouldn't bet on that, Miss Smith.'

'I would.' Sarah took the Brigadier's hands in hers. 'He's an alien. From Gallifrey in the constellation of something beginning

with “k”, I think. He’s not human, Brigadier. Yet in some ways,

he’s the most human person I think I’ve ever met. And he is the

same man, absolutely the same. He doesn’t look the same, or talk

the same, but he’s just as brave and just as determined to make the universe a better place and just as aware of his responsibilities to people like us. It’s still him. He’s still the Doctor.’

‘But how can he be? He doesn’t even think the same. I once saw

him on the verge of tears over a loony computer, yet he was first in line to destroy that experimental robot.’

‘You just have to trust me, Brigadier. He’s the same man. It’s

him. Your Doctor. Your friend.’

It took a few seconds before they both realised they were still

holding hands.

‘Sarah tells me you’ve just come back from the moon,’ Harry

offered. The Doctor put his sonic screwdriver away and gave a curt

grunt before rummaging in his pockets for his yo-yo. The yellow

plastic toy span downwards, hovered a few centimetres above the

chequered linoleum of the sickbay floor before spinning back up its twine, thanks to a deft tug of the Doctor’s wrist. This was a man

who had taken Harry to the furthest reaches of the universe, shown him the birth of a hideous race of mutants and battled to save the last survivors of the human race. Yet he looked for all the world like a sulky schoolboy trying to maintain his cool while stood outside of the headmaster’s office.

The desk was untidy, Harry decided. The pencils would look

much better all in the one pot, with the ink rubber and ruler to one side. His paperwork needed urgent attention and soon he found

himself shifting through medical reports that were long overdue.

The Doctor's yo-yo continued to rise and fall.

The uncomfortable silence was broken as Sarah returned with the

Brigadier in her wake.

'Now, look here, Doctor –' began the Brigadier.

'Harry here,' interrupted the Doctor, 'was just telling me about

your problem with the aliens – or lack of, weren't you, Harry?'

'Was I?'

'Yes, you were. And I was thinking that there might be the

slightest possibility that I owe you an apology. I was discourteous and I'm sorry.' The Brigadier was momentarily stunned.

'The Brigadier's sorry, too, aren't you Brigadier?'

The Brigadier looked at Harry and blushed. 'Yes, quite, Miss

Smith. All water under the bridge now though, eh?'

'Oh, absolutely. Wouldn't do for us to fall out, would it?

Especially now. Shake hands?'

Especially now, thought Harry. What did that mean? A knock at the door distracted the Brigadier.

'Excuse me, sir!' Warrant-Officer Benton stepped cautiously into

the room. He took in the situation, the Brigadier and the Doctor

holding hands, Dr Sullivan and Miss Smith looking awkward, and

decided to get on with his report. 'Sightings have been confirmed, sir. Alien activity over the Channel Islands. Perhaps as many as

fifteen definable objects of unknown origin.'

'Very good, Mr Benton,' said the Brigadier commandeering

Harry's phone and beginning to make a series of calls: to Corporal Bell to get the next name in the sequence for the operation; to the operations mom to confirm 'Operation Edgar' was underway; to

Campbell in the requisitions room to approve release of the required equipment; to Geneva to obtain the latest release codes; and to someone Sarah couldn't identify to say he wouldn't be home for dinner.

174

As the Brigadier took control, the room became charged with renewed excitement. Sarah caught a look in the Doctor's face. She couldn't be sure, but it looked very much like – *pride*.

'Come on, Sarah,' he whispered, and led the way out. Whatever the crisis, the Brigadier would find the solution by himself.

Inside the TARDIS, the Doctor pressed switches on the central control console that he claimed determined their destination, though Sarah was never that convinced it did anything of the sort. She leaned against one of the brass rails that curved around the central recess.

'Is that it?' she asked

'Hmm?'

'No goodbyes, no last words – not even a note? You're just going to slip off quietly and hope the Brigadier doesn't blow himself and the whole of Guernsey to kingdom come?'

The Doctor looked up, genuinely surprised. 'Have a little faith, Sarah. Alistair's a capable man, you know. He should be – he's had the benefit of my expertise for years now. I'm sure some of it rubbed off on him.' He peered at the helmic regulator, and then gave it a spin.

'But you're not going back, are you? To UNIT?'

'Whatever gave you that idea?'

‘Well? Are you?’

‘I explore the future, Sarah. I don’t predict it. But to answer your question, I should imagine we’ll see the Brigadier again very soon.’

‘And Harry?’

‘Oh, good old Harry. And Benton, too. He makes a splendid

cocoa, you know. Or was that the other fellow? It’s why I stayed as long as I did, you know. Can’t beat a mug of army cocoa.’

‘And the beacon on the moon. Are you going to dismantle it?’

‘The thing is, I noticed back there that the gravity readings had

altered slightly, which would suggest there’s been a small explosion on the dark side of the moon. Now, I could go and fix that beacon if the Brigadier wanted me to. But I don’t think he will, somehow. I

think he’s quite used to defending the Earth by now.’

‘“Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart – Defender of the Earth”. You

know, I’m not so sure he’d like that title.’

‘Too modest, that’s Alistair’s trouble. But he’ll do very well

without me. Exceedingly, in fact. You just wait and see. Now, did I ever take you to Bellicantra? Marvellous place. Well, if we get the right century. Bit of a war zone either side but some of the most

exquisite music you’ll ever hear, if you like baroque, which

fortunately I do.’

He continued to chunter away as he strode around the dark

wooden control room. Sarah knew what he was doing. He always

gabbled when he was trying to hide his emotions. When he was lost

or afraid, and especially when he was being brave. Right now, she

thought, letting his best friend carry on the good fight without him was probably the bravest thing she’d ever seen him do. And he was

right, she was certain. With Brigadier Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart around, Earth would be safe for a few more years yet.

176

What Has Happened to the Magic of 'Doctor Who'?

VII

Gareth Roberts

John Nathan-Turner

The BBC, Producer, 'Doctor Who'

18th February 1985

Dear Mr Nathan-Turner,

I'm writing, frankly, to complain. What have you done to 'Doctor Who'? For me, the magic I used to enjoy so much with the previous Doctor's stories is suddenly gone.

The fifth Doctor was serious and kindly and heroic, whereas the new Doctor is brash and boastful. But this is not my main gripe. I loved the old 'Doctor Who' because it was mind-expanding stuff – the science fiction aspects bordered on the magical, and there was so much to think about. Lots of freaky ideas. Like when Tegan got taken over by the Mara, you could look at it as all the emotions she had suppressed coming m the fore. Or the city that went round-and-round, or the sailing ships in space, or when the Concorde got taken back to dinosaur times but everybody thought they were still at Heathrow Airport. And then there was the huge spaceship where the lepers came to be cured, and the old church with the huge face in the crumbling wall. Or when the Time Lords decided to execute the Doctor for the good of the rest of the universe. They were all really

clever ideas that I still find myself thinking about, and really captured my imagination.

'Doctor Who' was a real 'thought' programme, if you know what I mean, like 'The Prisoner' or 'Sapphire and Steel'. The companions were all really different, great characters like Nyssa, Adric and Tegan, who you felt had lives and opinions about one another. There was always something surprising around the next corner – like when Adric died, or when the new companion Turlough was actually secretly plotting to kill the Doctor. So I don't understand why that winning formula has been changed. Peri seems

so one-dimensional in comparison to the old companions. And since the new Doctor came in, there's been not so much to think about. The series seems to reflect his personality now, as it's got cruel and cynical.

The fifth Doctor's Dalek story was good because it was all about the Doctor not being able to kill Davros because he feels for everybody, even the worst villain. The new Doctor doesn't seem to care when people around him die, he's far too interested in himself.

Also, the series seemed to me to be about opening your mind, being aware of others' viewpoints, showing that being kind and gentle was being strong, or at least another kind of strength. I can't believe in the Doctor after he set that trap with the poisonous plants in the Varos story, and killed the people who were chasing him in cold blood. Like the Doctor, the series has lost the warmth and positivity it used to have. So that's why I shan't be watching any more.

Miss Hannah Jennison (aged 16), Leeds

What Has Happened to the Magic of ‘Doctor Who’? continues on page 204

178

Trial by Fire

Mike Amberry

An adventure of the Sixth Doctor, with Evelyn

The wood felt timeless. Long shafts of bright sunlight filtered through the trees whose shadows dappled the mossy ground. Birds chattered gently in the green canopy and a solitary hungry boar rummaged among some fallen branches. It was a magical moment, an almost-still point in space and time. Until the tranquillity was rudely shattered.

‘Keep quiet back there!’

The gruff voice boomed through the wood like thunder announcing a summer storm. The startled birds scattered and the boar forgot its hunger and decided it needed to be elsewhere.

‘Sorry!’ called the Doctor cheerfully as he bumped along a forest track in the back of an ox cart. It was a relatively comfortable way to travel, he reflected. There was hay to lie on, though it didn’t appear too fresh, and the forest looked absolutely delightful on this summer afternoon. The only real fly in the ointment was the rope that bound his wrists and ankles, which was chafing somewhat.

That being said, the angry glare directed at him from across the cart by Dr Evelyn Smythe promised further trouble. There are few worse things in the world than angry old ladies.

‘Really, Doctor,’ she hissed, so as not to anger their captors

further. ‘When you promised me a trip to medieval France I was expecting to be viewing the completion of the cathedral at Chartres, like you said. What I wasn’t expecting was a morning spent orienteering followed by a ride in this filthy cart!’

‘Well, that was before we found out about the – what did they call it?’

‘The woodwose,’ said Evelyn, for at least the seventeenth time that day. She sighed. ‘It’s a well-known folk tale, even in England. You have heard of the Green Man? Or Jack in the Green? It’s simple country superstition, and nothing more.’

‘All superstitions have a kernel of truth, Evelyn. What those villagers described was no folk tale.’

‘So you keep reminding me. But after two hours traipsing through this forest following that confounded scanner of yours, did

we actually find anything? Just because something sounds alien to you doesn’t mean it actually exists.’

The Doctor looked sheepishly at the complicated piece of equipment lying in the hay at his side. It was a tube about 30 centimetres long, down the length of which a number of flashing lights were blinking busily. There were half a dozen tiny radio dishes rotating in all directions, yet the contraption seemed to be held together by sticky tape.

‘It’s usually quite reliable,’ said the Doctor defensively. ‘There was definitely something showing up in this forest.’

‘Whatever it was, it certainly wasn’t a woodwose. Now for

goodness' sake put that thing away, it's making the guards

uncomfortable. They already think you're some sort of wizard and,

in case you hadn't noticed, they're all carrying crossbows!'

Several miles away a young knight was preparing for battle. He sat in a stuffy tent, wobbling on a small wooden stool as his squire

struggled to pull his boots over his swollen ankles. He cursed the boy silently for his clumsiness. When the squire had finished with the boots, he fumbled his master's belt around his white runic and passed him his leather gloves. The tunic had on it a painted cross coloured a deep red, the sign of a soldier in the service of God.

'Brecq, see to my father's horse while I'm gone. I expect we'll be heading away from here soon.'

'Yes, sir. Will there really be a battle today?'

'I expect so. Baron de Montfort is not a patient man. He has no

time for long sieges.' With that, Ralf d'Urville left the confines of his tent to join the gathering of Crusader knights who clustered

around the tent of his lord and commander.

The Doctor, thought Evelyn, had spent too much time in captivity to be taking their current predicament seriously. He seemed to be

using this latest arrest as a chance to enjoy the view and smell the country air. Every now and again he tried to strike up a

conversation with the burly cart driver, which usually resulted in a telling-off from the captain of the guards. 'At the very least they could tell us where it is they're taking us,' sniffed the Doctor after his latest rebuke.

'Doctor, I'm sure we can explain ourselves when we arrive at

wherever it is we're going.'

The forest started to thin out again and a wide river became

visible through the trees. On the far bank of the river a high citadel towered above fields of green. Two dozen towers gleamed white in

the bright sunlight and long, golden banners fluttered from their

tallest points. Before the walls, over a hundred tents of differing sizes stood shrouded in the smoke of campfires, and the hammering

of metal against metal rang loudly even from so far away. It was an impressive sight, but it gave Evelyn cause for concern.

‘Doctor, those towers! This can only be one place. We’re at

Carcassonne!’

‘Southern France?’ The urgency in Evelyn’s voice didn’t seem to

have fazed the Doctor. ‘Perhaps the co-ordinates were a little out this time...’

‘That’s not the problem! When is this? Early 13th-century? Look

at the tents! The city before us is under siege from a huge army.

We’re in the middle of a Crusade!’

‘We are?’

‘I thought you knew your history! It’s the Crusade against the

Cathar heretics. A particularly nasty period in French history and not one that was especially high on my list of places to visit, thank you very much!’

‘Like you said, I’m sure we can explain ourselves to the local

lord, whoever he is.’

‘It might not be that easy. The guards who arrested us specifically accused us of sorcery, which suggests we’re being taken for trial

before an ecclesiastical court. This particular Crusade saw the first appearance of a group of people who rather liked passing judgement on sorcerers and witches.’

‘Really?’

‘Don’t be so naive! You must know that we’re about to meet the

Inquisition!'

The cart stopped at a shack by the river. The Doctor and Evelyn

had their legs untied before being dragged from the cart and pushed towards a landing stage where a small boat bobbed on the brown

water. The ferryman cast off the rope then spoke quietly to one of the guards.

'The Pope's man has arrived.'

'I've heard of his work. God save us all.'

The crossing was mercifully short as Evelyn, who didn't like

boats at the best of times, was desperately trying to think of

anything else other than sinking while her hands were tied. On the far bank was a grander landing stage that served a squat sandstone building, perhaps an abbey or nunnery, in the grounds of which the army had pitched their tents. Unloaded from the boat, the prisoners were marched through the camp towards a large tented pavilion

strewn with banners in every colour and bearing many coats of

arms. In front of the pavilion, tied to an ox-cart similar to the one that had brought them here, was the TARDIS.

'That's a relief,' Evelyn sighed. 'If we can persuade these people we're not sorcerers, at least we won't have to go back through that forest!'

'You mean you don't want to see the woodwose now?'

'I never wanted to see the ruddy thing in the first place!'

The guards stopped outside the grand pavilion just as a short,

thickset man in fine armour pushed his way out through the flap. He had a dark face and a bushy moustache framing a thin, angry mouth.

Several knights stumbled out of the tent behind him. All looked

worried. The short man noticed the guards and their charges and

strode over.

‘What have we here? Some more troublemakers for Amalric to frighten?’

The captain answered nervously. ‘N-n-no, my lord. Witches, seen conjuring demons at Pont d’Avers.’

The Doctor cut in. ‘That would be “allegedly” conjuring demons, surely? I believe we at least get a trial before anyone goes around saying we’ve been up to that sort of thing.’

‘You will indeed get a trial!’ The short man laughed sharply, making his moustache quiver. ‘Grand Inquisitor Arnaud Amalric has arrived and, as it happens, has seen fit to dispossess me of my own tent. He loves a good trial, preferably followed by a good burning!’

‘This just gets better,’ muttered Evelyn.

The man regarded them closely. ‘You are no ordinary villagers. Those are fine robes, albeit gaudy,’ he said, pointing at the Doctor’s coat. ‘I would take you for a nobleman.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ said the Doctor, with unusual politeness. ‘I am indeed known at the English court.’

‘As was I, before that snivelling wretch John stole my lands!’ He turned. ‘D’Urville!’

Ralf, who had been standing with the other knights, stepped forward. ‘My Lord de Montfort?’

‘These prisoners are in your care. Take them before our friend the Inquisitor and make sure he treats them fairly.’

‘Yes, my Lord.’

With that, Baron Simon de Montfort, Captain-General of the Crusading army, marched off angrily to find himself another tent.

The inside of the pavilion was dark and hot. The heavy flaps muffled the sounds of the camp. The Doctor and Evelyn stood before a cluster of tonsured churchmen in robes of white and dark brown. At the centre sat a thin, hungry-looking man with a hook-nose and piercing eyes, which Evelyn felt boring into her as she

tried to avoid his gaze. The Grand Inquisitor was a formidable man, but it was a short, plump deacon who asked the questions.

‘State your name.’

‘The Doctor.’

‘That is a title. State your name.’

‘Doctor John Smith.’

‘Better. Where are you from?’

‘Oh, a long way away. I doubt you’d have heard of it’

‘I’m from England,’ added Evelyn helpfully.

‘What is your purpose here?’

‘I suppose you might call me a traveller.’

Evelyn had a bright idea. ‘Yes, we’re travellers. We’re on a pilgrimage.’

The deacon eyed her suspiciously. ‘You have not been addressed by the council, woman. Hold your tongue.’ He returned his gaze to the Doctor. ‘A pilgrimage? Where would that be to?’

‘To Rome, of course! Two faithful pilgrims on the way to see

Saint Peter's. Now, if you'll just show us the way out?'

'Do not mock me, stranger!' The seemingly meek deacon's sudden sharpness took the Doctor by surprise. 'You stand accused of heinous crimes and your mortal souls lie in the balance. This court will grant your freedom only when it is satisfied you are not in league with demons and unbelievers.' He called to the guards by the tent's opening. 'Bring in the witnesses.'

The Doctor and Evelyn turned as a tent flap opened and two peasants from Pont d'Avers were ushered in. It took them a moment for their wary eyes to adjust to the gloom. Once they saw the clergymen they bowed deeply and crossed themselves.

The Grand Inquisitor rose from his seat. 'Thank you, Deacon Hugues. I will continue from here.'

Amalric gestured for the peasants to sit to one side of the Council. He appeared the model of clerical humility, though he still radiated authority. All eyes were on him as he spoke.

'Why don't you tell the Council your names and what you saw this morning?'

'My Lord,' began the first peasant, a fat man in a grubby blacksmith's apron. 'I am Guillaume, a humble tradesman faithful to Christ and knowing nothing of the dark arts.'

He paused to mop sweat from his chubby jowls and pointed to the Doctor and Evelyn.

'1 spoke to the two strangers before you as they passed through our village this morning. I told them of the fearsome demon in the forest which frightens our cattle and preys on our chickens. They

seemed most interested in its ways and straight away set off to find

its lair, yet it has not harmed them. They must be in league with the demon and, on behalf of my village, I crave your lordship's

protection!'

'The Church smiles on the faithful, my son.'

The Doctor sighed audibly. 'Shall I defend myself now or must

we hear the rest of this torrent of superstitious nonsense first,

hmm?'

'All in good time.' Amalric studied the Doctor closely and the

Doctor held his gaze. After a moment he smiled and turned to the

second peasant. 'And you are?'

'Martin the oxherd, sir.' The boy, thought Evelyn, must have

been 13 years old at the very most. His voice wavered nervously

between boyhood and manhood. 'I saw these strangers, too. They

brought with them a wooden box but no cart or horses with which

to move it, sir, er, my lord.'

The captain of the guards was hovering to one side of the

proceedings and spoke up. 'My men have brought the box here for

the Council's consideration.'

'Very good,' smiled Amalric. 'Now, Martis, can you tell us what

else you saw?'

'My lord, I saw this man here using a...' he paused, 'a device of

unholy origin.'

'My little scanner?' The Doctor pulled the contraption from a

deep pocket in his coat. ‘This old thing? Nothing to worry about here. It’s just an applied multi-phasal field resonance scanner. A bit of basic science, really.’

He looked at the worried glances he was receiving from the Council and the horrified expressions on the witnesses’ faces. ‘Of course, you lot aren’t known for your love of science, are you?’

The Doctor carefully stowed the scanner back where it had come from and smiled his most winning smile at the Council. Deep in his pocket, the scanner gave a sad beep.

Amalric alone was unmoved by the Doctor’s presentation.

‘Doctor Smith, your involvement with demons, the strange items you carry, the robes you wear, all of these things mark you out as a sorcerer. I have been charged by His Holiness to rid this land of ungodly influences. If you are in league with Beelzebub, you will answer for your filthy crimes in the sulphurous torment of Hell!’

This was about as much as the Doctor could take.

‘Look here! This is just superstitious poppycock! We are travellers and we mean no harm. In fact, I was trying to save these people’s precious village from coming to quite a lot of harm should what you call the woodwose become hungry for more than the occasional chicken!’

The Doctor drew himself up and placed his thumbs behind his lapels, as if he were a barrister addressing a more conventional courtroom.

‘You speak of sorcery. Sorcery is just a name that you give to something you don’t understand. It is nothing to do with devils or demons or witches. I put it to you that, as a great man once said, there

are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy. Or at least, he will say it. At some point. These men are simple, honest folk who are only telling you what you want to hear.

Just listen to yourselves. “Sorcerer’s robes!” What piffle!’

Amalric looked on impassively and, when the Doctor had

finished his outburst, calmly invited Guillaume to elaborate further on the nature of the woodwose. As the fat blacksmith embroidered

an impressively exaggerated tale around a recent appearance of the creature, the Doctor stood and seethed indignantly. Evelyn leaned

across and whispered to him.

‘It won’t do us any good to get angry with these people. They

believe entirely in what they are doing, even if it seems like

superstitious nonsense to you. Do you have a plan to get us out of here, or are you going to bait the Inquisitor until he decides we’re guilty enough to burn?’

‘I’ve been on trial before, Evelyn – several times. I’m sure I’ll

come up with something, if I actually get the chance to defend

myself.’

‘Just try to remain calm.’

‘Woman!’ interrupted Amalric. ‘You continue to try the patience

of this court.’

‘Who? Me?’ said Evelyn sheepishly. ‘Sorry about that, Your

Worship.’

‘You also stand accused.’

‘I can’t think what of I’m just a poor pilgrim forced to cross these troubled lands on my way to Rome.’

‘Why, it has been said that you did speak to a familiar. In Pont

d’Avers this very morning you conversed in devilish discourse with a

black cat!'

The monks of the Council recoiled in horror. Evelyn was taken aback. 'Talking with a cat? I gave it a stroke and told it what a pretty cat it was!'

'A likely story,' Amalric continued smugly. 'And look, Council members, this sorcerer wears the mark of the cat on his wizard's robes!'

'Now hang on just a minute!' cried Evelyn.

The Doctor leaned across. 'I thought you said we should remain calm?'

'But this is nonsense!'

'That's just what I was saying.'

The Council was deep in discussion, looking fearfully at the dreadful Doctor and his cat-loving accomplice. Amalric silenced them with a raised hand.

'Fellow councillors, you have heard the charges brought against this pair. I'm sure we are all in agreement that the evidence is conclusive?' There was a general wave of nodding and murmurs of assent.

'Just hold on there,' interrupted the Doctor. 'I'm sure that we should be given the chance to disprove the accusations made against us? I demand a proper trial!'

'And you shall have one!' Amalric grinned with fanatical glee.

'A trial by fire! Should the flames consume you, your innocence

will be proven and we will pray to God for the deliverance of your unblemished souls. Should your demonic masters save you from the

flames, your guilt will be clear for all to see. D'Urville, take this man to our prison in the abbey cellars while we prepare the trial.

The old woman, for the sake of modesty and on account of her

advanced years, shall be guarded in the camp.'

'And what do you mean by "advanced years"? I'll have you

know –'

But Evelyn realised that no one was listening as she was marched

from the tent into the bright light of a Mediterranean afternoon.

The Doctor took in his surroundings. As dungeons went, it was a

fairly comfortable one. There was fresh straw on the floor and the smell wasn't as powerful as the ox cart that had brought them here.

These cellars had probably flooded recently if the green slime on

the walls was anything to go by. His wrists were sore from the

chafing of the rope that had bound him and, rubbing some life back into them, he crossed the room to perch on a barrel and consider his next move.

Time passed. The Doctor sat and looked wistfully at the heavy

oak door and its iron lock, wishing, not for the first time, that he still had his sonic screwdriver. He was suddenly aware that he

wasn't alone and turned to see a man sitting in the shadows in the corner of the room, watching him silently. They looked at each

other for a few moments until the stranger spoke: 'If you have

thoughts of escape, my new friend, I would put them to one side.'

The Doctor smiled. 'Oh, I've been in a lot of dungeons. I actually find thoughts of escape quite healthy in these circumstances.'

'I do not recognise you, though you must be a knight or noble if

they have locked you in here with me. Most people who meet this

foul army just end up slaughtered.'

'I am a lord, of sorts.'

'Then well met. I am Raymond Roger de Trencavel, Viscount of

Carcassonne.'

'I'm the Doctor. I'm probably stating the obvious here, but

shouldn't you be inside the city right now?'

'Inside, outside...' the man's voice cracked. 'Neither matters any more. All is lost.'

Trencavel was a sorry sight, perched on a stone ledge with a

heavy cloak pulled about him. His dark hair was unkempt and his

face unshaven. He was, to the Doctor's eyes, somewhere in his

twenties, but he had the bearing of a man at least twice that age. The Doctor felt a flicker of anger towards Trencavel's captors when he realised that his fellow prisoner had probably been tortured.

'I've only just arrived here,' said the Doctor, breaking the silence.

'What does this army want?'

'They have come for the Cathars. They call them heretics,

decrying them as enemies of the Pope. The plan is to convert them

to the true faith or kill them all.'

Trencavel rose stiffly. As he did so, his cloak opened slightly to show a fine robe of white and gold beneath. He crossed the room

and sat on a barrel next to the Doctor.

'I tried to negotiate with them, as God is my witness, I tried. The minute I heard His Holiness had called a Crusade I went to

Montpellier to speak to the leaders. They would not see me. These

men are lords from the north, in the service of the King of France, and they're hungry for land – my land.'

'Does the King not protect you?'

'I am in an unusual position, holding lands in France and Aragon.

My family have always kept in favour with both sides. Once I was

turned away I realised things were more serious than I'd thought. I returned to Carcassonne as fast as I could and made preparations for a long siege.'

'That city looks like it could hold out for months.'

Trencavel drew himself up proudly.

'Years! And it has, in the past. There is just one problem: the city is crammed full of refugees. What food and water we had time to

stockpile is not enough to feed everyone. The Crusaders control the water supply and they're slowly starving us out. I feared for my

people and asked for parley with de Montfort, which was granted.

But the terms were harsh and I had to refuse – which was the point he had me thrown into this dungeon.'

'You were taken prisoner while you were negotiating?'

'And under a white flag. This may be a holy army but its leaders

are godless men with no concept of chivalry.'

'What will happen to your people?'

'My castellan had strict instruction to surrender in one week

should I fail to return. Enough time for all of my subjects, Cathar, Christian and Jew, to be brought to safety. And the day of

Carcassonne's surrender has arrived.'

'Today?'

'Yes, Doctor.'

‘And can you get all your people out?’

‘Of course. My people are good at building walls and towers –

and they are even better at tunnels and passageways. Why, the

whole citadel is like a warren! Slowly, surely, my people are being led to safety while His Holiness’s glorious crusading army kicks its heels outside our walls.’

For the first time the Doctor saw Trencavel smile, but it was brief.

‘They have massacred enough of my people. The army broke

through the gates at Beziers. They slaughtered everyone inside.

They burned down the cathedral as the women and children

sheltered within, most of them not even Cathars,’ he spat. ‘These

are men who fight with the Holy Cross on their tabards! I have lived alongside Cathars all my life and so did my father before me. They may be heretics but they would never stoop to such sinful crimes.’

Trencavel grasped the Doctor’s arm and whispered: ‘Listen for

three blasts of the clarion, Doctor. When the trumpets blast, the

gates will open and you shall bear witness to my victory!’

The iron bars of the door began to be drawn across and a gruff

voice boomed: ‘Stand away from the door! We come for Doctor

John Smith.’

Trencavel relaxed his grip, fixing his cellmate with a firm gaze.

‘God be with you, Doctor. I fear we will not meet again.’

Evelyn watched from outside d’Urville’s tent as a huge pyre was

built in front of the great pavilion. The young knight hurried back and forth in the distance, making himself useful to the lords who

had gathered to watch the trial.

‘Not a cloud in the sky,’ Evelyn whispered to herself. ‘Where’s a

nice and heavy summer rainstorm when you need one?'

The squire, Brecq, sat nearby, a short blade in his hand pointing

vaguely in the direction of the fearsome witch he had been told to guard. He plucked up a little courage to speak.

'Do you speak to your demon masters?'

'Don't be silly! I don't have any of those! I've just got a funny

habit of talking to myself, that's all.'

'My master told me you spoke to demons.'

'I spoke to a cat. I don't think it was a demon, though.'

'Did it speak back to you?' The boy's eyes were full of wonder.

'It purred a little.' Evelyn smiled kindly at him. 'I'm no witch,

lad, no matter what your master might tell you. These are difficult times, lots of people are being accused of all sorts of crimes. It can be hard to know who's telling the truth and who isn't.'

'The Inquisitor knows how to find the guilty.'

'I'm not so sure he does.'

'He does! When we were at Beziers I heard my master ask him

how, when our troops stood at the gates of the city, we should tell Cathar from Christian, heretic from true believer.'

'And what did he say?'

'He said we should kill them all, that the Lord would know those

that were his.'

Evelyn looked at the young squire, who was trying hard to blink

back tears and stop his bottom lip from quaking.

'They all died. Everyone. Even the little children.'

‘I’m sorry.’

‘I can still see them.’

Brecq looked up to see his master approaching and quickly wiped his eyes with his sleeve.

‘I haven’t been speaking to you,’ he whispered.

D’Urville approached and nodded his head. ‘Mistress Evelyn, I am to take you for your trial. I pray to God that you are innocent.’

As well as being a competent abbot and a devoted follower of the Pope, Arnaud Amalric was a great showman.

The assembled crowd of Crusading lords and their knights watched spellbound as Amalric reeled off the list of charges against the Doctor and Evelyn with an eloquence that PT Barnum himself would have envied. Yes, he could certainly hold the attention of a crowd, and there was nothing like burning a couple of heretics to ensure that crowd’s continuing devotion to the cause.

Every major noble in the camp was there, except for Simon de Montfort. Amalric would have to keep an eye on him as he was too proud and ambitious to be left to his own devices, But, the abbot conceded, he had served in the last Crusade to the Holy Land and Amalric needed men like him to encourage the others. At least he knew where de Montfort was – every few minutes there was the sound of a mangonel firing another load of rocks or a rotting sheep over the high walls of Carcassonne.

From the top of the pyre the Doctor and Evelyn struggled against the ropes that bound them tightly to the stake. The wood beneath their feet was dry and looked like it would burn very well. The

TARDIS had been added to the pile as the guards had lost interest in it after trying to hack their way inside for an hour. The safety it promised was just metres away, but the ropes held firm.

'You know, Doctor, one of my students described me as a witch once, and I told her she was probably right. But I had no idea I'd end up being burned as one! Are you sure you don't have some sort of cunning plan up your sleeve?'

'I think this Amalric chap is determined to burn us, no matter what I might say to prove our innocence. Do you see how much he's enjoying himself down there?'

'He's loving every minute! I wish I could say the same. Do you think we get a last request?'

'Probably not,'

'It doesn't matter. They've not even discovered chocolate yet.'

'If I had a few more minutes I could probably get my right hand free. I wonder if we could make it to the TARDIS before –'

'Doctor John Smith!' Amalric had turned to them, his arms outstretched, a manic smile plastered across his thin face. 'Do you wish to take this opportunity, before the holy crusading army and before God, to confess of your crimes and receive absolution for your sins?'

The Doctor was considering a flippant remark when, in the distance, a shrill trumpet broke the silence. Not one of the assembled nobles seemed to hear it, being too caught up by the spell their Inquisitor had woven. The Doctor smiled and decided it was

time to give Amalric what he wanted to hear.

‘Very well, Grand Inquisitor! You have won, and I confess!’

Evelyn whispered: ‘This had better be good.’

The Doctor ignored her. ‘I confess I have consorted with demons.

I have led my companion here astray and placed her in grave danger through my foolish actions. Now, if God will only forgive me my

sins, I promise to become a better man in future!’

‘A wise choice, sinner!’ Amalric yelled triumphantly. ‘He who is

truly repentant can still find his way into the Kingdom of Heaven.

You need not fear the flames if you are sorry for your sins!’

A second trumpet sounded, just as the mangonel hurled another

rock, which bounced ineffectually off the huge ramparts.

‘I am truly repentant. I humbly ask that God spare me and my

companion from the fire.’

‘I’ll second that,’ grumbled Evelyn.

Shouting as loud as he could to the congregation, the Doctor

called: ‘To prove my repentance I ask that God send us all a sign. If I am to be saved, let the city here surrender immediately!’

There was a moment of bemused silence as all eyes turned

towards the gates of the city. It was one of those moments that

seemed to go on forever, where the slightest noise would suddenly

break the spell.

Then, as the Doctor willed it to happen with every fibre of his

being, a third trumpet sounded. Slowly, jerkily, the great gate of Carcassonne began to open.

The nobles sprang to their feet, some shouting of miracles, others leaping and cheering.

The knights rushed towards their tents to grab swords, shields and lances in readiness for the slaughter that was to come. Only Amalric stood motionless, his eyes remaining fixed on the Doctor.

'What trickery is this?'

'It's a miracle, Amalric. I thought you of all people would

appreciate a miracle.'

'I see through your tricks, Doctor. You will burn – and then the

whole miserable city of Carcassonne will burn. It is God's will!'

With that, the Inquisitor seized a red-hot brand from a brazier at the foot of the pyre and thrust it into the pile of dry wood. He turned with a sweep of his robe and strode towards the gates with his arms outstretched, calling his army to level all before them in the name of God.

The brand soon ignited the tinder. Sparks fluttered in the warm

breeze, creating small flames, which soon spread higher.

Evelyn began to panic. 'Please tell me that you've got a hand

free, Doctor!'

'Not... quite...'

As the Doctor struggled against his ropes he saw the distant

drawbridge meet the ground and the castle garrison begin to march

slowly across it towards the crusading army. The men wore no

armour and carried white flags painted with black crosses. De

Montfort's soldiers were first on the scene, capturing and binding them before taking them away. The rest of the crusading army

began to gather outside the gate, waiting for the Inquisitor's order to advance into the city.

Evelyn felt a hand on her arm. Turning, she saw Brecq had

climbed the pyre to meet them, his sharp blade in his hand. Smiling shyly, he set to work on their bonds and soon had them free.

‘Thank you, Brecq. Thank you so much!’

‘You’re welcome, Mistress Evelyn.’ The boy grinned at her. ‘I

heard what your friend said and I saw the city surrender. There’s no way you two can be witches.’

‘At last, someone believes me!’ The Doctor ruffled the boy’s hair

and they both helped Evelyn down towards the waiting TARDIS.

‘Will you not get in trouble for helping us?’ Evelyn asked the

young squire.

‘I’d not thought of that, Mistress.’

The Doctor wrestled away the dry branches that were blocking

the door before turning to Brecq. ‘If anyone asks how we got away, tell them it was another miracle! Now, run to your master!’

Brecq turned and ran off eagerly. As soon as he had disappeared

out of sight the Doctor opened the TARDIS door and ushered

Evelyn inside before the spreading flames could reach them.

The TARDIS doors closed with a reassuring thud. Evelyn leaned

against the console to catch her breath as the Doctor busied himself at the controls. ‘Now that’s what I call a close shave!’

‘It certainly was. I don’t know how you managed that little trick

of yours, but it worked! So what do we do now?’

‘There’s not much else we can do, other than get out of here.’

Evelyn stared at him, horrified. ‘You mean we’re not going to try

to save those people in the city?'

The Doctor looked at his friend. 'What could we do for them?

We came close to being burned alive back there, I doubt very much

that any of the crusading army will listen to us, even after my little stunt.'

'But there are thousands of innocent people in that city!'

'Maybe not, Evelyn. Look, you said yourself that this was a dark

time in French history. There are some things that are too big, too complicated, even for a Time Lord to change. Some points in time

that must remain as they always have been.'

But it doesn't make it right!'

'If we go back outside, we will likely be arrested, even killed. If we go into the city, the army will slaughter us. Tell me, how does this end?'

'I know how it ends. Hundreds of thousands of people will be

made homeless. Many so-called heretics will be burned alive or

maimed by brutal armies such as this one. Families will be torn

apart by suspicion as the Inquisition spreads like a cancer across Europe. Someone must be able to do something! Surely?'

The Doctor did not reply. Instead, he returned his attention to the controls.

'We have to go – now. If these people see the TARDIS

dematerialise it will only serve to fuel their superstitious beliefs.

Best to disappear in the flames as we were meant to.'

Evelyn looked sadly at the central column as it began to rise and

fall.

'I wish I was able to perform magic. At least then I could do

something to help those poor people.'

‘Oh, I think there has already been a very impressive piece of magic performed at Carcassonne, Evelyn. One great, big vanishing act, in fact.’

Shortly after the TARDIS had disappeared, unnoticed, in a shower of sparks and burning wood, the crusading army marched over the drawbridge and through the great gatehouse of Carcassonne.

A long column of knights led the way, bright ribbons tied to the tips of their lances and plumes streaming from their helmets. After them came the standard-bearers, the banner of the Pope at their head. The common foot soldiers followed, poorly armed but full of righteous anger and desperate to meet the heretics they despised.

It was young Ralf d’Urville who was first into the city, eager for glory and his reputation. The sight that greeted him was not as he expected. Instead of the crowds of seaming citizens and refugees, the begging, pleading masses of a defeated enemy, he saw no one.

Inside the city, not a single soul remained to meet him.

Death Sentences

Stephen Hatcher

An adventure of the Sixth and Seventh Doctors

Charisma, despite its name, was not the sort of planet that people came to because they wanted to. There were no great industries to attract migrant workers. It was without any significant mineral or precious metal deposits for rapacious companies to turn greedy eyes upon. And there were no man-made or natural wonders for tourists to spend their hard-earned cash visiting.

Decades had passed since the golden age of this near-forgotten world. There had been a time when Charisma had lain on the frontiers of human space and the young men and women of Hogarth City would sneak into lively bars to listen to pioneers and explorers swap tales of voyages of discovery.

As the frontier expanded and the pioneers went with it, the young people still came to the bars, at first to drink and tell second-hand stories, and then, as they grew older and hadn't got off the planet, just to drink. The great transport ships that had always used Charisma as a stopping point to refuel and to allow the tens of

thousands of outward-bound colonists a last taste of real, human civilisation, had better technology and found quicker routes, and had taken their trade with them.

The wars that followed the boom years of the Great Expansion passed Charisma by. It lay far behind the front lines, ignored and stagnating. Within less than two centuries of its settling, the reasons for Charisma's existence as a human settlement had ceased to be apparent. It became a desperate place. Visitors had come for the most part to escape, to hide, to die or to kill.

There was very little law here. A corrupt judiciary and an apathetic police force made Charisma a criminal's playground. Even the trappings of government could only be described as threadbare at best when all knew that it was the gangs that really controlled what was left of the planet. Thick, black clouds obscuring the light of both moons made for a particularly dark night in Hogarth City. Down one of its many narrow streets a few street lamps struggled vainly to illuminate the drunks and drug-users clinging to walls for support, or sprawling in surrender in gutters.

Thieves and gangsters kept to the shadows as they went about their business. Painfully thin women sought out the pools of light, anxious to display what was obviously for sale.

Without warning, the mood of the street changed. Seemingly without cause, the atmosphere became tense. A shrill whistle cut through the air – a signal relayed by some unseen lookout. As one, the various inhabitants of the night looked up, almost like a herd of grazing animals, fearful that they were about to become some

predator's evening meal.

The cause of the disturbance turned the corner and came into view. It was an unimpressive-looking man whose appearance gave no clue as to why his arrival provoked such concern. He was short, in a peaked cap and wearing a heavy grey coat that hung almost to the ground. A thick scarf was wound around his neck against the cold night air. Some of the street -dwellers glanced to each other as if seeking reassurance. Probably a watchman, they thought, but it was a rare to see one venture this far from the city centre at night.

As he passed along the street, the man glanced at each person, pointing a dim torch in every direction. Most turned away; some, satisfied the stranger posed no threat, growled an aggressive oath at him. There was no love for watchmen in this district.

The man kept moving, gratified that his watchers weren't interested in him. Coming to the corner of an alley, he paused, peering into the darkness. 'No, not here. Not this one.'

He moved on. The next alley brought no more success, and neither did the next nor the next.

At the fifth corner he repeated his actions and was about to move away when something caught his eye. He looked again. 'Maybe. Is this it?' Perhaps he had imagined it, but no, he had been right, there was something there. Back in the furthest, darkest corner, a blue-white light strobed weakly. 'Now,' he muttered to himself, 'that looks right.' With the feeble torch pointing the way, he left the street and edged into the darkness.

His eyes grew used to the gloom and he could make out more details of the alleyway. It was dirty, damp – no surprise there – and no

more than a narrow passageway between two tenement blocks. Blocked drains, rotting rubbish and the activities of the ever-growing rodent population lent it a disagreeable odour. The watchman advanced warily towards the light that he had seen from the road. He was upon it before he knew. He whistled gently through his teeth and raised a quizzical eyebrow. The light was flashing feebly but insistently as if fighting to remain lit. Below it stood a tall box, dark blue in colour, but stained with dirt. At eye level there were dark windows that continued around the structure.

Facing him, the front of the box held a notice giving the instruction 'Pull To Open'. Hesitantly, he held out a hand and touched the box, feeling a faint vibration against his palm. The box seemed to respond to him. He was sure the light he could see coming from inside was burning brighter. He withdrew his hand and the light faded.

A sudden sound made him turn. The beam of his torch alighted on an emaciated cat in a doorway. He smiled to himself and then realised the cat was not alone. He turned the beam upwards, but could make out nothing more than the vague shape of a man. At the same time, the cat, concluding that any hope of a meal or at least of some attention was to be denied, sauntered off.

'I saw you come down the street, watchman. You had them worried for a moment.' The man's voice was clear and resonant.

The watchman paused. 'Yes, I rather think I did. Still, it does no harm to be on one's guard. Who knows what hides in the shadows on a night like this?' He tried again to pick out his companion with

the torch, but could make out no more of him than before. ‘You, for example, what manner of man are you? Are you, indeed, a man?

Charisma is home to all manner of creatures. Show yourself’

The other man chuckled. At that moment a shuttered window

above was thrown open allowing a bright shaft of light to illuminate his head. He glanced upwards at the source of the light, from where strange, lilting music could be heard. He stepped forward, out of the shadows, allowing the watchman to see him properly. He was tall,

with a distinctive face. He stood, hands on hips, piercing eyes

twinkling as they looked down onto the watchman in an expression

that appeared simultaneously disapproving and oddly benevolent.

His broad brow was crowned with a mop of unruly blond curls. His

unusual coat picked him out as a stranger to Hogarth City.

Neither man spoke as they sized each other up. The watchman

appeared suddenly nervous as the stranger smiled, as if waiting for the officer of the law to speak.

After a moment, the watchman spoke. ‘Who are you?’ he asked.

‘Show me your papers.’

The stranger kept smiling, spreading his arms wide. ‘You can see

I am unarmed. As to who I am, let’s say a traveller, a wanderer, an explorer. And papers? I’m afraid I cannot help you there. It’s a

policy of mine never to carry any.’

The watchman hesitated, as if unsure whether or not he should

arrest the man. ‘What are you doing here?’

‘As I said, I am an explorer. I explore. I arrive somewhere new

and I discover things. In any city, the dark corners are where you find some of the most revealing things. The alleyways, the snickets, 196

the ginnels, the gitties, the bunnyruns, the wynds, the twittens, the

sideways – you know there are hundreds if not thousands of different words for the spaces between buildings such as this one. Fascinating, simply fascinating.' The watchman gave a light laugh but kept his expression serious. 'That's all very well, but this city can be a dangerous place, particularly for unwary strangers.'

'Anywhere can be dangerous if you don't know what you are doing. Luckily, I know *exactly* what I am doing.'

'Even so, this is a bad time to visit Hogarth City. I expect you've heard about the murders?'

'Murders?' The man's interest seemed piqued.

'Yes, murders. There is a killer on the loose.'

'Really? Tell me more.'

'I don't know all the details. I just know what everyone else knows – well, maybe just a little bit more.'

'I haven't heard anything about them. Do tell me. Tell me everything.' The man's obvious interest could almost be tasted as he leaned in towards the watchman in anticipation of the story. The watchman seemed uneasy and checked the far end of the alleyway as if he planned to leave. Instead, he began to tell the tale.

'The first victim was found one morning just over three weeks ago. An old man, one of the many unfortunates who live on Hogarth City's streets. His body was discovered in an alleyway much like this one. There were no marks on him. There was no sign of attack. There was nothing. He was just dead. The doctors couldn't make head nor tail of it. He hadn't had a heart attack, or a stroke, or anything that could explain his death. It was put down as natural

causes, but when more dead bodies in the same condition started

turning up, that was when the authorities started to pay attention.

This isn't a great city, but a killer like this on the loose is

everybody's business.'

The second man listened keenly without saying a word.

'By this time, five bodies had been found. There was talk of some

sort of disease, perhaps even the start of an epidemic. The victims had nothing in common. They were men and women, young and

old. None of them was the same as the last. After that first homeless man, the second victim was a wealthy woman, a lawyer of all things in this lawless place. And the pattern has continued, even though

there isn't a pattern. Rich, poor, educated, uneducated, each time there are no marks on the body. There is never an obvious cause of death. It was after the ninth or tenth victim that ordinary people like you and me began to talk of a killer stalking the streets. The

authorities denied it, of course, but it was the only thing that seemed to fit. There have been fifteen victims so far. Someone or something

is loose and is killing indiscriminately. You need to be careful.

Hanging about areas like this in the middle of the night could prove fatal.'

The taller man smiled. Grasping his lapels he drew himself up to

his full height. 'Oh, I think I shall be fine. I've travelled further than you can imagine and I've seen some of the most horrific things that the universe has to throw at an unwary traveller. Monsters, weird

creatures, fiends, things of the night, I've seen more than I care to mention. The sensible or lucky ones have run away from me. Most

of those that haven't I've defeated. I've encountered ignorance,

cruelty, selfishness and just plain evil, but still I am here.' He gave a self-satisfied smile, as if pleased with this little speech, then turned his attention back to the watchman. 'But there's more isn't there? I sense

there are things you haven't told me yet.'

'Yes, there is one very strange thing. Later on the day the first body was found, the victim was seen, scavenging for something to eat, just like he did every other day, and seen by three credible witnesses. The man was dead, and yet he was seen alive. The lawyer, too. Her secretary saw her outside her office. For each of the victims it's the same story. They have all been seen alive and well at a time after the police knew that they had been killed.'

'So, we have a ghost story and a murder-mystery rolled into one? Some sort of spectre or ghoul or apparition perhaps?'

'Even if such things were real, ghosts can't interact with the world around them like these people did. They picked things up, ate, opened and closed doors, even spoke. These were living people.'

'Definitely a three-pipe problem!' exclaimed the stranger who smiled at the watchman's puzzled expression. 'I'll have to keep my eyes peeled for the living dead.'

'I think we both will.'

The stranger reached into the pocket of his coat and brought out a small, scrunched-up paper bag. He proffered it to the watchman.

'Would you care for a toffee?'

The watchman took a sweet. 'Thank you. That's very kind.'

The other man also helped himself to a toffee and the two began chewing thoughtfully without speaking.

The watchman broke the silence. 'What brings you to Charisma?'

The stranger coughed and blustered for a second before

answering. ‘Erm, I travel more or less randomly, here and there, to this planet and that I’m never quite sure what I will find when I

arrive but there always seems to be something to keep me

interested. Take your little problem with these murders, for

example.’

198

‘“Little problem”?’

‘Perhaps that’s why I’m here. Maybe there is something I can do

to help. I do have a talent in the area of detection, a certain

expertise. Your killer wouldn’t be the first that I have caught.

Sometimes I wish I could use arrive on some planet and have a little rest, perhaps a holiday, but the universe keeps throwing these

problems my way.’

‘I’m sure any help you could give would be gratefully received.

The watchmen are woefully understaffed. But you need to talk to

the proper authorities.’

‘Yes, yes, of course.’

‘It must be hard for you. I mean, all of those terrible things you say you’ve seen. Surely it could drive a man mad? I mean to say, I –’

‘Yes, you’re right. It can be hard, righting wrongs and doing

good.’

The watchman couldn’t help but smile at the man’s overblown

manner.

‘What worries me most,’ he added, ‘is that all the evil that I have seen might have infected me. There is a darkness within all of us –

those of us who have a capacity for great good must surely have a

capacity for great evil. I am able to resist the dark side of my nature, but perhaps there may come a day when I cannot. Whatever

happens, I cannot allow myself to become that darker me.'

This puzzled the watchman. 'But you must have seen great good

as well as great evil? Tell me about some of that.'

The stranger stared at him. After a moment he said, 'No, not just

now. I would much rather hear about you. Tell me about you.'

'Me? There's not much to tell. No monsters, no bizarre creatures.

There's nothing much of interest at all. I wouldn't want to bore you with...'

'I insist!' said the stranger abruptly. 'Tell me. Tell me all about yourself.'

Surprised at the interruption, the watchman spluttered for a

moment, taken aback. 'Well I, er, my name is Edward. I was

married, but my wife, Eleanor, is dead six long years. I have a son, John...'

The watchman was aware the stranger's attention was focused on

his words. He leant forward in an almost hungry manner. Edward

faltered. 'That's about it really, I...'

'No, no, no!' The man's manner had changed. All traces of the

friendly if slightly pompous do-gooder had gone. 'Tell me all you

know, Edward. Tell me everything.'

The watchman hesitated then turned to leave. 'I must go. I need

to complete my rounds.'

'Tell me everything.'

The watchman looked back at the stranger. He shook his head

and carried on walking through the dark and stinking alley. That

was when it struck him that he was still talking– he was obeying the man's command! He struggled with the words that seemed to be

forcing themselves out of his mouth.

'My name is Edward... My name is Edward. I was born on Earth

in '06. My parents, Lawrence and Mary, were a well-connected

upper-middle-class couple. After what was, I suppose, a relatively normal childhood...' With an effort, he paused.

'Go on,' the stranger urged. 'Tell me everything.'

The watchman looked puzzled as he carried on. 'Like all boys of

my class, I was sent away to school. We were born to lead, you see, and the world's future leaders needed a particular type of education: how to take and give orders; an automatic belief in ourselves and

our superiors; concentration on the job in hand and never mind

irrelevancies such as right and wrong or conscience. It was a brutal system. If the masters weren't beating you, the other boys were. It was hard but, somehow, I survived.'

The watchman felt as if he was under some bizarre obligation and

tried to reject the colourful stranger's demands, yet he could do

nothing to counter what was happening to him. He put all his efforts into trying to stop, but this time he managed no more than the

briefest of pauses. He continued.

'After school, I travelled. I was determined to see something of

the world. That urge to discover, to find out what was out there has never left me. When the opportunity arose to enter a career that

combined travel with investigation, I grabbed it with both hands. I became a spy. It was an exciting time and a dangerous one. Various power blocs were manoeuvring for supremacy. War was

approaching. My job put me at the centre of many of the political

and diplomatic machinations of the period. My war started years

before that of most of my countrymen.'

The watchman was visibly losing strength. He leant against a

grime-encrusted brick wall, struggling for breath but unable to stop talking. The cap fell from his head.

'Of course, when the war came, things became even worse – and

odd. I saw some strange things in those years.'

The stranger's level of interest was raised higher. 'What "strange things"? Tell me, Edward. Tell me about the "strange things". Tell me everything.'

'Well, I met, that is to say, I kept on meeting, I saw the –'

Suddenly his voice became clearer, harder. 'It was during the war

that I met my wife Eleanor.'

200

The stranger looked frustrated with the monologue's change of

direction, but said nothing.

'My best friend, George, took a shine to her, but I was the lucky

one. We fell hopelessly in love. After a brief romance we were

married and had thirty happy years together.'

The watchman suddenly sank to the ground, as if the effort of this revelation had drained him. He gazed weakly at the colourful

stranger, his eyes begging for some kind of release that he couldn't explain. He needed to stop talking, but couldn't.

'I nearly lost Eleanor when our son was born. If it hadn't been for the doctors, I don't know what I would have done.'

The voice faltered, but although the words were becoming

indistinct, little more than a whisper, they continued to come.

‘As I grew older, the nature of my job changed, became more desk-bound, although I still managed to get out in the field from time to time. And then, one day, they decided they didn’t need me. Not long after that, Eleanor died. For a while it felt like that was the end for me.’ He shook his head slightly. ‘Then I met the Doctor.’

The watchman’s eyes were suddenly alight and alive. The ferocity of his gaze took the stranger by surprise. ‘And I think this is where this stops.’ At that, the watchman silently collected himself together and stood, dusting himself down.

Horrified, the stranger could only gape. The watchman’s voice had changed and his entire demeanour was different. He gasped. ‘Watchman, Edward... please! Tell me more. I need more.’ He seemed to weaken as the watchman stood and the stream of words ended.

‘You have feasted enough. And I am not Edward. I hope my old friend Edward Grainger will not mind my having borrowed his life story. If I had come here today openly as myself, then you would not have dared to attack me. I know you because we have met before. I am the Doctor and you, you are Logovore – a word-eater. You feed off the life essences of your victims through their words. You befriend them, engage them in conversation and make them talk themselves to death.’ The Doctor smiled grimly at that so-familiar face, the face that had been his own in his previous regeneration. ‘I see that in feeding, you take on the physical attributes of your victims.’

By now he had shaken off the grey coat, letting it fall to the ground, revealing a cream linen suit and a paisley scarf.

The creature regained some of his composure. ‘The Time Lord! You have changed since we met two nights ago. You looked, well, like this!’ He swept his hands imperiously in front of his own head and body. He laughed cruelly. ‘No matter. I defeated you and I will 201 do so again. You have had a long, long life and I shall dine on you for a week. I will devour every ounce of your essence!’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘Last time you took me by surprise. I wasn’t ready. Even so, I was strong enough to fight back before you had taken too much. Things are different now. I have the advantage.’

‘You’ve come to kill me, Time Lord? Can you do that? I know that you’re no killer.’

‘I’m not here to kill you – but I will do what I must to stop you.’

The monster wearing his old face laughed. ‘I do what I must to survive. I will not apologise for the way I am. Further, I don’t believe you have what it takes to beat me, Doctor.’

‘Are you sure, Logovore? In your timeline our meeting was only two nights ago, but it’s been a lifetime for me. I’m literally a different person.’

The creature sneered. ‘That remains to be seen. Doctor, tell me everything.’

The Logovore’s attack was intense but the Doctor was ready.

‘No, not this time. You tell me! *Tell me everything!* ’

The two circled each other, each probing the other mentally,

searching for a weakness. The Doctor opened his mouth as if to speak then, smiling grimly, shut it again. Then the Logovore seemed to weaken, but he too was able to fight off the Doctor's attack. The two seemed evenly matched and the first rays of Charisma's rising red sun had begun to infiltrate the darkness of the alley before the decisive break was made. The Logovore let out a piercing shriek, falling to the floor. He began to talk.

'I am Logovore. I travel the galaxy looking for food to allow me to live. I feed on the words of my prey. I have fed sixteen times since coming to Charisma.' He paused.

'Tell me everything,' the Doctor commanded.

He continued. 'I fed on you two nights ago, but you were too strong and I couldn't finish the meal. But I had eaten more than enough. It was a fine meal.'

As the Doctor watched, the Logovore's features changed. No longer did they resemble those of his sixth self. They were, he assumed, those of another of the Logovore's victims.

The Logovore continued to speak, reciting the details of each of his victims, his appearance changing as he told each story. The Logovore continued to grow weaker until he was lying on the ground, but still telling his victims' tales. Completing the sixteenth story, that of his first victim on Charisma, the Doctor looked upon the defeated predator with pity.

'Enough. I have no wish for you to die. Stop talking. Tell me no

more.'

The Logovore gave no sign of having heard. The frenzy with which he had fed from his victims was now turned upon himself. Perhaps thirty more life stories were told in whispers, rasps and sobs. Thirty victims who had their revenge.

The Doctor became anxious. He didn't want the Logovore's death on his conscience. 'Stop, I command you! Tell me no more.'

But it was too late. The Logovore fell silent. His featureless shell of body lay like a bundle of discarded rags in the gutter.

It had happened again. No matter how much he wanted to avoid killing, it seemed too often the choice was taken away from him. He shook his head sadly and turned to where the TARDIS had witnessed the night's events. It now stood proudly alive, windows illuminated and the light shining brightly from its roof. He had to leave. His other self would be here soon after recovering from the attack two nights previously. The Doctor looked to the ground and saw that there was little left of the Logovore's body. By the time his previous self arrived, it would be no more than dust.

The Doctor hurried from the alleyway, heading for the sanctuary of his ship. The grey day had started and people and vehicles were filling the streets, but he ignored them all.

He didn't know where he would go now, but he hoped it would be a better place than this, in a better time than this, somewhere his hearts would be lifted and not feel so black with guilt.

What Has Happened to the Magic of 'Doctor Who'?

VIII

Gareth Roberts

John Nathan-Turner

The BBC, Producer, 'Doctor Who'

8th December 1988

Dear Mr Nathan-Turner,

I'm writing because I'm dismayed at the new series of 'Doctor Who'. It seems to me that something has gone very wrong, the magic has gone away, and there doesn't seem to be a single reason to continue to watch any longer.

I'm talking about what you've done to the Doctor himself. He is a hero who blunders into danger and then saves the day using wit and desperate improvisation. In the trial story he was accused of being a wilful, reckless adventurer who revelled in his own personal freewheeling through space and time. It turned out in that story that he was being misrepresented by the prosecutor, and he was acquitted. Well, 1 hope the Time Lords don't decide to put him on trial again after the events of the last few stories, because he'd definitely be found guilty.

The Doctor I remember would just happen upon some terrible injustice, like the video torture on Varos, and make up a plan to stop it as he went along. This new Doctor seems to have it all meticulously planned out from the start – in the last few weeks he's deliberately lured the Daleks and the Cybermen into his traps and apparently wiped them all out! And even in the Kandyman story, he hinted to Ace that he knew what was happening on the Happy Planet and had come there to stop it.

'Doctor Who' is about the cold, calculating plans of the monsters versus the quick thinking of the brilliant Doctor. For example, when the Vervoids went on their compost rampage, the Doctor thought up

a plan to kill them using the minerals on the space cruiseliner, but he only did it as a last resort, and at the last possible moment. The 204

new Doctor purposefully went out of his way to kill Davros and all of the Daleks. This seems to me to be really against the heroic grain of the character, to be in fact the exact opposite of what 'Doctor Who' is all about.

Also, he is not a violent man and doesn't carry weapons, but he

pretty obviously knows that Ace is carrying her bombs in her

rucksack and still uses her as a blunt instrument. He is rather callous to her in general, not explaining what he's really doing – as if he can't trust her or doesn't think she's clever enough to understand.

He was never like that with Mel, who felt like a real, proper friend.

The previous Doctor was loud and melodramatic but you felt you

could always rely on him, which is why the twisted evidence in the trial that showed him being uncaring was so shocking. This new

Doctor is a rather frightening, ambiguous figure, manipulating his enemies and even his friends.

For that reason, 'Doctor Who' has lost its magic for me and I

shan't be watching from now on.

Mr B Crowley, Preston

What Has Happened to the Magic of 'Doctor Who'? continues on page 238

Once upon a Time Machine

Stephen Dunn

An adventure of the Third Doctor, with Jo

'No! Not from a book!' Lisa pulled a face. 'One of the stories about the girl called Jo and the funny man and his time machine.' She

smiled pleadingly in the way that only five-year-old girls can.

Her mother tried to look stern, as if she were going to need a lot of persuading. She had excused herself to come upstairs and check

to see whether her daughter had fallen asleep. Of course she hadn't.

As her friends continued chatting and drinking downstairs,

immersed in the adult world of alcohol and sharing stories and

memories, she decided her daughter was much more likely to settle

if she had a little more attention. She looked at the books scattered across the floor and spilling out of Lisa's travel bag and, while she picked them up, flipped through a handful of them pretending to

consider their merits. But she had known they wouldn't be

necessary.

'Muuuum...' Lisa said, looking at her imploringly.

'Okay, then, but a quick story. We are guests, you know.' On cue,

laughter and the popping of a cork could be heard. She plonked the little blonde girl onto her knee and enjoyed the feeling of her resting in her arm. 'Are you ready?'

Lisa nodded her head.

'I'll have to check you are ready, you know. Okay... Let's see...

Do you remember what TARDIS stands for?'

'Of course!' Her mother laughed at Lisa's overconfidence. 'It

stands for...' She paused. 'Time... and...' She paused again.

'T-A-R-D-I-S,' her mother hinted.

'Time and... really dangerous adventures in space!'

Her mother smiled. 'I think you added an "A" in there, didn't

you? But you certainly could say that. The Doctor always said that it stood for "Time and Relative Dimension in Space," although I've never been quite sure what that really means. Anyway, what type of story do you want? One set in the future or one that delves into the past?'

‘I want a fairy story!’ Lisa said.

Her mum raised an eyebrow. ‘If you want. Okay, so... a long time

ago, in a galaxy –’

Lisa interrupted. ‘Mum!’ she exclaimed, laughing. ‘Stop messing

with the story! You can’t mess with stories!’

Her mother laughed. ‘Well, I think it was a long time ago, but

whether it was in our galaxy or another one, I really don’t know.’

Her mother gently drew Lisa’s soft hair together, fixing it into a ponytail with a purple band. She often told Lisa stories from books, and her daughter had noticed that, lately, the books seemed to have more words and fewer pictures. They both loved stories about

magical kingdoms in faraway places, accessible through wardrobes

or impossibly high trees in enchanted woods.

She knew that Lisa also liked to be scared – just a little – and

knew that she would love to hear a story that her mother hadn’t told before, something that maybe had giant monsters in it, or ones that bit people and turned them green, but maybe they would be better

left for when she was a little bit older.

Trying to think of an adventure of the Doctor’s that could be

classed as a fairy tale was making her think hard. As she thought, Lisa turned to look directly into her face and said quietly: ‘I heard you shout in the night, Mummy. It made me stay awake for ages

and ages.’

She froze for a second as her daughter looked up with those

beautiful blue eyes, and then tried to relax, but she knew she’d

reacted to what her daughter had said and Lisa had picked up on it.

‘It was only a horrid dream,’ she said, but she knew that as Lisa

turned her head away she hadn't convinced her.

She looked down at her precious child, warm and so alive in her

arms, feeling like her heart was about to burst, hating to lie but knowing there was no way Lisa could understand.

'So what are "ice warrior", Mummy?'

She sighed, trying to exhale all the bad thoughts, and said: 'Do

you want to hear a story or not?' in a tone that sounded a little

sharper than she would have liked.

'Okay, Mummy.'

Lisa loved the Doctor-and-Jo stories for the simple reason that Lisa knew that they were real. The Doctor was real, the TARDIS was

real and, most certainly, Jo was real. Despite being impossible, Lisa knew the tales from far across the universe, or far into the future or in the past contained a truth that stories set on a world found in furniture or a magical forest simply did not.

Lisa snuggled into her mother's hold. She loved it when Mummy

told the Doctor-and-Jo stories. She became different, full of energy.

And being sat on her mother's lap became the safest place in the

entire universe.

Her mother closed her eyes.

'This story is about a wise and wonderful queen, although she

wasn't a queen when the Doctor and Jo first met her.

'The Doctor and Jo landed on a distant planet...'

Mother and daughter had played this game many times before. Both

made wheezing and grinding noises, sounds that human vocal cords

aren't designed to echo. How could they imitate the folding,

shifting, cutting and tearing of time and space the TARDIS needed to accomplish in order to travel? Still, they gave it their all.

'Lisa?' The fun was over for a second. 'What would you do if you heard that noise?'

'I would find you or run away and hide.' Lisa responded in a bored singsong voice. They both knew this was a lie, but neither said anything until Lisa complained that her mum really did need to get on with the story now, please. 'Where did they land, Mummy? What was the planet called? What did it look like? What...?'

'Slow down!' Her mother laughed. 'The Doctor and Jo landed just outside a city. They saw tall, pointed towers, lined up in rows, equally spaced apart, like a giant domino game. Very ordered, very precise. Even though Jo and the Doctor had to crane their necks to take it all in, their view was blocked by the clouds that covered the highest parts of some of the buildings. There was a big, orange sun high in the sky that was reflected a million times in the buildings' windows and, combined with the deep green sky, it was almost too much to take in. Jo thought it was so bold and beautiful – but it was cold, like a clear winter day.

Lisa's mum stopped for a second. 'Oh, yes. I forgot. I don't know what the planet was called.'

'Why not?'

'The quickest way to arouse suspicion is to ask what a planet is called, as it shows you're not from around there.'

'Did the sky make everything green? Or did the orange sun make everything orange? Like when I put on my disco light in my bedroom.'

'Good question.' Lisa's mother smiled at her daughter's growing

intelligence. ‘But, no, it didn’t change the colour of anything. No more than our blue sky makes everything look blue or our yellow

sun turns things yellow.’ She wondered how many children realised

that their parents often answered questions by the skin of their teeth or simply by telling a lie.

She hugged Lisa into her arms. ‘So…’ she continued.

* * *

208

The Doctor and Jo walked towards a city. An old crone with her head half-hidden by the hood of her cloak offered them some apples and Jo reached out to take one. But the Doctor grabbed her hand and said: ‘No, thank you. Not today.’

They walked past a large pond. Jo dawdled to look at it more

closely as the Doctor strode ahead. She stared as a frog suddenly smiled and winked at her, before plopping back into the pool. Jo quickly ran to catch up with the Doctor.

The city was vast and each of its towers had huge triangular flags that fluttered down the sides of each building. The Doctor seemed particularly interested in the architecture, painting out to Jo how the city was made up of so many types of buildings. Jo knew the Doctor was just showing off, but it was an amazing illusion that what had appeared so uniform was, inflict, so diverse.

The Doctor pointed at two impressively tall and elaborate towers either side of a gateway that appeared to be the main entrance to the city. The gate was open and its portcullis raised, so the Doctor and Jo ventured in. They didn’t get very far before six ceremonial guards drew near. They were dressed entirely in black except for the gold braid on their shoulders, and the gold and silver of their swords.

Shouting in unison, they proclaimed: All hail Prince. Sophia, the most wise, the most beautiful, the most magnificent, whose

greatness knows no end!’

After an elaborate salute that ended with them striking their fists against their chests, the Doctor and Jo turned away from looking at the towers and

towards the guards but they didn't respond with anything more than a slight smile. The guards took a more

defensive stance and spoke again, but this time much louder. 'ALL

hail Princess Sophia!' This time it was definitely a command.

'By whose order?' The Doctor asked, looking directly at a guard with slightly more gold showing on his uniform. 'No, let me guess –

Princess Sophia!'

'Uh-oh,' said Lisa. 'Why didn't they just hail Princess Sophia like the guards told them to?'

'"Uh-oh" indeed,' said her mother. 'It certainly would have been

the easiest thing to do, wouldn't it? But the Doctor rarely took the easiest path. And we both know that the Doctor didn't like people

who acted as if they're more important than everyone else,

especially him, unless they really, really deserved it. Anyway,' she smiled, 'it wouldn't have been much of an adventure.' Her voice

became an exaggerated monotone. 'The Doctor and Jo said, "All

hail Princess Sophia", wandered around for a bit and then went

home. The end.' Lisa's mother pretended to stand as though her

story was done. She looked at Lisa and, smiling, asked: 'What do

you think? Was that good enough or shall I continue with the real

story?'

'The real story! The real story!' Lisa squirmed in delight as her

mother sat down.

'All! Hail! Princess! Sophia!' The guards spat each word out, all pretence at ceremony gone. They had moved their hands onto the ornate hilts of their swords, to show the threat if their command wasn't followed.

The Doctor didn't move but carried on looking directly at them.

‘Soldiers or otherwise, I’m afraid neither I nor my young friend here like your attitude one bit.’ He leaned forward, so that the beak of his nose was almost touching the head guard’s. ‘If Princess Sophia is even a little bit as great as you say, then why does she need you to get people to say that for her?’

All six guards appeared to hesitate, and looked at each other for an answer. No one had ever reused to salute them before, and they were suddenly unsure what they were supposed to do next. A

distorted and angry female voice interrupted the silence from a loudspeaker in the square: ‘Guards! Arrest them!’

The Doctor struck a Venusian Aikido pose but stepped back and

reconsidered this as guards appeared out of every door

surrounding the square.

‘Run!’ he shouted, his arm around Jo’s shoulders, propelling her forward.

In their hurry to leave they nearly knocked over a man who was just crossing the square. As they dashed past, his brown cloak swirled round him and he clutched more tightly to the satchel he was carrying as he sought to regain his balance.

Lisa was delighted when her mother began bouncing her on her

knee, faster and faster, then picked her up and swung her around

and around. Lisa couldn’t stop laughing as her mother raced this

way then that until they both collapsed on Lisa’s bed, laughing. She scooped her up again and ran around the room before hiding behind

the sofa. They peeked out over the top as if looking for the guards that were chasing the Doctor and Jo.

As they caught their breath, Lisa looked around her temporary

bedroom. She had already looked at most of the photographs and

paintings on the walls and didn’t really like them. They just seemed to be full of old men and men wearing uniforms. But one caught her eye. It was a line up of serious-looking soldiers and in the middle 210

was her mother smiling broadly.

‘Mum, that’s you isn’t it?’ Her mother nodded slowly. ‘What are you doing with those soldiers?’

‘I’ll tell you about them all one day. But not now. Maybe when you’re a little older.’

Lisa scowled. When would that be? When she was eight? Ten? And did that mean her brother Matthew had already heard all these stories? It wasn’t fair if he had. Just because he was older he got to do everything first. She sighed. It was hard being five, harder still to have an older brother. Her mother caught the sigh, and grabbed her daughter up in her arms.

‘Don’t you want to know how the story ends?’

Lisa did want to know but she also wanted to know about the pictures. From conversations she wasn’t meant to have heard she already knew that when her mum had been younger she’d worked for a secret place that she never, ever talked about. Lisa looked at her mother, then at the photos. She could tell that she wasn’t going to be told about them today. It wasn’t fair that she didn’t get to hear the interesting stuff. One day she would know all her mum’s secrets and all about the photos. Just wait until she was six, she thought.

Then they would have to tell her!

Her mother distracted her with a kiss on the cheek, and continued with the story.

The Doctor and Jo ran down a street but had to turn back when they found it blocked by the guards. An alleyway was similarly blocked and they soon found themselves hemmed in. The Doctor raised his hands to signal that they surrendered but Jo saw the glint in his eyes. Being arrested was troublesome, but she knew the Doctor thought it often meant that you got taken to the heart of the problem.

The Doctor and Jo were escorted through a maze of stone

corridors. It grew darker and narrower as they went. From the

things she could see in the lamplight, Jo was glad it wasn't any brighter. If she couldn't see the cobwebbed walls or whatever it was that was squelching under her feet, then that was probably a good thing. Jo stumbled a couple of times as they were hurried along by the guards but fear of landing in or on whatever was on the floor helped to keep her upright. The guards came to an abrupt stop at a large wooden door. Without ceremony, they opened it and threw the Doctor, then Jo, onto the floor, before closing the door again with a clang. The Doctor had fallen very hard and sat on the ground

rubbing his head.

'Are you hurt?' A girl appeared from the shadows and knelt

down beside the Doctor.

'I'll be fine,' said the Doctor, brushing the dirt off his clothes.

'Jo?'

'Fine here, too. I think you broke my fall!'

The girl studied them closely. 'Why did they arrest you?'

We failed to hail Princess Sophia when the guards told us to,' Jo

explained.

'Standing up to the guards is very brave. Or very stupid. They executed the last person who did that.' The girl smiled. 'Anyway, I am forgetting my manners. I'm Alice. And you are...?'

'I am the Doctor, and may I introduce Jo, my assistant.'

'Hello,' Alice and Jo said at the same time.

'Exactly what was all that about with the guards?' The Doctor

waved his hands around in an exaggerated version of the salute.

'Princess Sophia hopes to be crowned Queen tomorrow. She's

been using an army of guards to scare and bully people to be on her side. And many do. Take her side that is. Not because they like her, but because they fear her.'

'So what's your part in this?' the Doctor asked. 'You're here, so I can guess you don't like what Sophia is doing. But why?'

Lisa's mother smiled. 'This is the interesting part.' She paused.

'Guess who Alice was!'

'Who?'

'No, I said you had to guess! I think the Doctor already had.'

Lisa closed her eyes and thought hard. 'A boy!' Lisa had recently

been to a pantomime and had been fascinated that Jack was played

by a girl but his mother was played by a man in a dress.

'No, but that was a good try. Do you want to guess again?' Lisa

shook her head. 'Alice was really Princess Alice and...' her mother drew the suspense out. 'And... Princess Sophia's twin sister!'

'Whoa!' Lisa's mouth grew big and round, her eyes widened.

'Did they look exactly the same?'

'Well, Alice had blonde curly hair, a bit like yours, and she had

round rosy-red cheeks, but what made her really pretty was her big smile and friendly eyes.'

'And did Princess Sophia look the same?'

'We haven't met her yet,' her mother reminded her. 'You don't

know if the Doctor and Jo are even going to meet her!'

'I bet we do!'

'Wait and see!'

'You said that your sister hopes to be crowned Queen tomorrow,'

said the Doctor. 'As twins you can't have an equal claim to the 212

throne. One has got to be the elder. Why don't you try to stop her?

Or,' he paused, 'is Sophia the elder?'

'By three minutes,' Alice said unhappily, looking away. She took off her locket and opened it. In one half there was a picture of an old man with long curly hair. In the other were a young man and woman looking at each other, both very much in love.

'My mother and father both died when we were young,' Alice

said. 'My late grandfather, the King, raised us. Tomorrow is the first anniversary of his death and Sophia and I must face the final challenge he set to see who will become Queen. Grandfather didn't believe that just because someone was born before someone else they should automatically have authority and power. He thought you had to earn it. Before he died, he came up with a series of challenges, to show which one of us should be Queen. So far we've taken and passed all his tests. I am sure Sophia cheats but I can't prove it. Without proof I'll just look like a bad sport.' She paused, and shut the locket sadly. 'Maybe I am, but I do want to be Queen and I do love the people so very much.'

'Who judges the tests?' the Doctor asked.

'The palace priests. They're the only people Sophia has never

been able to bully or bribe,' Alice said, although there was a slight hesitation in her voice.

'And what tests have you had so far?'

'You have to understand that my grandfather was an old-

fashioned ruler. One of the tests involved feeling a pea through a dozen mattresses. I didn't pass it – I couldn't feel a thing. After the test, Sophia handed me the pea. She had made one of her servants remove it before I lay down. For the next test, we had to look at three apples and guess which one was poisoned. I got it right – I just knew which one it was, But Sophia protested. She said I'd cheated because the apple had a puncture mark that you could see if you looked at it in a certain light. That was when she had me arrested and thrown into prison. I've been here ever since, only being let out to take part in the tests.'

'What were the other tests?' Jo asked curiously.

'Telling wolves from grandmothers was one we both passed, but

that was rather easy. I won the test about which magic needle

would put you to sleep, but Sophia pricked me with it when the test was over. Luckily for me, the spell was to sleep for 100 minutes not 100 years. I found and tamed a unicorn, whereas Sophia could not.'

Alice paused, then added quietly, with a sadness that made Jo's heart feel empty: 'Her hatred and anger have grown with every test I have passed. The more successful I am, the less well I'm treated.

First, my blankets were removed, now my food has become staler 213

and I'm no longer allowed to change my clothes or wash.'

'Will you gain your freedom if you win after the final test?' Jo asked.

Alice shrugged. 'The last test is the hardest,' she said.

'Grandfather honestly thought that if you were really royal, you had an inner magic that would lead you to your destiny. But all the tests Sophia and I passed so far weren't just about magic, as such. I mean, Sophia could be right, I could have subconsciously seen the mark on the apple.'

Alice looked crestfallen. 'I'm not sure what my destiny is.

Sometimes I don't even think I'm a princess at all. Maybe I was a foundling. I mean, I don't even look like my sister!'

Lisa stopped her mother at this point. 'I thought that Alice and

Sophia were twins?'

'They were, but twins aren't always identical.'

Lisa was still puzzled by this but decided not to enquire further.

She knew that if you asked the wrong question in the wrong place,

an exciting story could turn into a lesson more boring than anything at the school she had just started. So Lisa just nodded and kept quiet while her mother continued.

'My grandfather's final challenge is that we should magically

divine the contents of a specially sealed temple. Before he died, he placed three items inside. No one knows what they are. He sealed the temple wall himself and posted guards from the priesthood day and night, to stop

anyone from cheating. Anyway, as we have both passed an equal number of challenges this last test will be the one that decides who is really to be Queen.'

Suddenly there was a thud from outside the door and two

breathless young men appeared at the door.

'We have come here to rescue you Princess Alice,' one said. But even as he spoke, the guards could be heard running towards them, and they didn't sound friendly.

Alice looked at her would-be rescuers and the Doctor for help.

'Run!' they said in unison. And everyone did, Alice, the Doctor, the two young men and Jo, down the corridor and into the darkness.

'What happened next?' Lisa asked.

Lisa's mother hesitated and chose her words carefully.

'All of them ran, but they couldn't all get away quickly enough.

There was a fight And the Doctor, Jo and Alice were tied up,

arrested and taken back to the cell.'

Lisa interrupted. 'Tell me about the fight!' She knew her mother

was about to move the story on and she was having none of it. A

fight! The most interesting part of the story and her mother wanted to ignore it. No way! 'Tell me about the fight!'

'What have I told you about fighting?'

'Not to,' Lisa responded quietly.

'Why?'

'Fighting is dangerous and people get hurt.' Lisa delivered the

words of an old lesson by rote.

'Yes. Fighting is dangerous and people get hurt.'

‘So, what happened to the rescuers?’

Her mother answered in a quiet voice: ‘They were sent away.’

She didn’t look at her daughter as she said the words. Lisa frowned. Something was wrong with the story, but the sadness in her mother’s voice wouldn’t allow any further comment. Silence filled the room until her mother continued.

The Doctor, Alice and Jo were taken back to the cell. The Doctor didn’t seem too bothered about being locked up as it had happened to him lots and lots of times before and Alice had become resigned to being imprisoned.

While they tried to loosen the ropes that bound them, the Doctor and Jo talked to Alice, finding out all they could about her family.

They asked tots of questions about her grandfather and her parents but, importantly, what she would do if she were to become Queen.

Alice always thought carefully before answering their questions.

‘I want to be Queen because I think that I can make a difference.

The world is changing. We have radio now and they are talking

about sending people to the moons. I believe that being a king, queen, baron or lord means that you have a responsibility to those around you. You cannot just be an observer, never interfering.

Instead, you should use your position to do good. If you can’t, you should stand down and allow someone else to take your place.’

Alice looked straight at the Doctor. ‘But you know this, don’t you? I thought I knew every lord in the land, but it seems that I was wrong.’

The Doctor smiled. ‘Yes, I am a lord, but my home is a long way from here.’ He paused, thinking for a moment. ‘I hope you will be a just ruler, Princess Alice, and I have a plan to help you. But you must trust me and do exactly as I say.’

Alice thought for a moment, looked hard at the Doctor and then nodded her consent. So, in the darkness of the cell, the Doctor whispered a plan to Alice, taking care to make sure the guards outside did not overhear them.

When morning came, Alice's sister, Princess Sophia, came to look at the prisoners and to release them. She laughed and said they should enjoy their freedom while it lasted. As soon as she was Queen, she would have them all returned to the cell and locked up once more.

'See!' Lisa said. 'I said she was going to be in the story! What did she look like?' Did she look mean and horrible?'

'She wore a very pretty purple dress and looked just like the models you see on TV. She had long, straight blonde hair and would have been beautiful if she didn't have a cruel look that made any prettiness disappear,' her mother replied.

'Straight blond hair like Matthew?' Lisa asked carefully. Surely this story was proof that older brothers or sisters were always trouble! 'But why did Sophia lock Alice up? Why didn't she have Princess Alice killed?'

'I don't know,' said her mother, shocked at her daughter's bloodthirstiness. 'It might be because she thought that people would be suspicious if Alice just happened to disappear the day before the final test. It might be that, in some ways, Sophia still loved her sister. I mean, you and your brother fight and you sometimes say that you hate him, but you wouldn't want to kill him, would you?'

Lisa had to think about this. From a rather dark corner in her mind she realised she knew better than to answer. It would only lead to trouble. Shaking her head, she was glad when her mother smiled and carried on with the story.

Despite being the same age as Alice, Sophia's voice was childish and petulant.

'I know for certain what is in the temple!' she taunted. 'Maybe you should bow down before me now, because in a very short time I will be Queen,

and you,' she laughed snidely, 'will be my subjects.'

'How do you know?' Alice exclaimed, looking first at the Doctor then at Jo.

'I just do, little sister,' sneered Sophia. 'And so I am going to be Queen. Then you will be locked up again. If you are really lucky Alice, and I feel very kind, after a few more years in these cells I may be merciful and exile you. So get used to it, little sister. No matter how pathetically you look at me, and there's nothing you can do that can stop me!'

At this, Lisa's mum impersonated Sophia stamping her foot. Lisa

followed suit, enjoying the noise that her foot made against the

wooden floor.

Princess Sophia led the way out of the cells with the guards

following, flanking the prisoners all the way to the temple. Built on 216

a raised platform, it made a stage to one side of the massive square near the city gate the Doctor and Jo had arrived in just the day before. Thousands of people had gathered to watch the magical test being performed, some of whom, Jo was sure, were pointing and

laughing at Alice, who had tried in vain to smooth her clothes and hair down so that she looked less dishevelled. Compared to her sister, she didn't look one bit like a princess. She looked sad, tired, and rather dirty and crumpled from her many days in the cells.

A procession of priests entered at the far end of the square,

cutting a swathe through the mass of people. They were all wearing robes of different colours and it took a long, long time for them to reach the temple. By the time they did, there was silence in the square. All those people – and all that silence!

The head priest arrived. His name, Alice whispered to the Doctor and Jo as they stood on the temple steps, was Karven. He had dark skin and his head was shaved. His long robes were coloured deep blue. He entered last, as befitted his position. When he reached the temple steps, he took the hand of each princess and moved them to either side of him.

'Princess Sophia! Princess Alice!' he cried – and Jo thought she caught him smiling at Sophia, and her heart leapt into her mouth.

Jo tried pointing this out to the Doctor, but he seemed preoccupied.

'We are gathered here today to witness which of you has divine magic running in your royal veins. Today your people will find out which of you is the true heiress to the throne.'

He beckoned them to step forward to the front of the platform.

'Princess Sophia – as the elder sister by three minutes, 'give you the first chance to say what you see in your mind! Tell me, tell your people, what lies inside the temple?'

'I see...' Princess Sophia paused dramatically and closed her

eyes. 'A crown, a sceptre and a mace!' She smiled triumphantly to the crowd.

Karven the priest turned to Alice. 'Princess Alice, this is your chance. Tell the people before you, what do you see? What lies inside the temple?'

Alice smiled and answered confidently and clearly: 'I see a red cylinder with string tied around it, a bag of sweets and a device for keeping off the rain.'

When they heard this, the people in the crowd began to laugh.

The high priest raised his hands to the crowds and called for

silence in his big, booming voice. He gave the guards instructions to open the temple door. As they broke the seat and turned the lock, Alice added excitedly: 'Oh yes! And a bag of gold coins to be

shared by all here today.' Jo saw the Doctor look annoyed and

heard him muttering something about 'yet another girl who

couldn't stick to a simple plan'.

Karven moved towards the temple's open doors. He knew Alice

and Sophia's grandfather well. He knew that, as well as a belief in magic, the old king had enjoyed a sense of the theatrical. He wasn't surprised to hear on pulling the doors open that they did so with the flourish of a recorded fanfare. The people in the crowd gasped.

Inside, there was a raised plinth that had been angled so that most of the audience could see it. Although from a distance it was hard to make out every shape, they could see that there was no crown, no sceptre and no mace as Sophia had predicted.

Karven marched to the plinth, lifted the three objects he found on it, and brought them out of the temple and onto the stage. In his hands were a yo-yo, a bag of sweets and an umbrella that

accidentally unfurled in his hands, which caused him to drop

everything, making everyone in the crowd roar with laughter.

Furiously, the priest picked up them up again. While he was

distracted, Jo scurried to take a close look into the temple as she could see something glistening. There, hidden in a corner, was a bag of gold. And that wasn't the only thing she saw... But she picked up the bag and gave it to Alice.

Outside, Sophia could barely contain her fury, shouting that no one had any right to take the throne other than herself, as she was the elder sister. 'Arrest Alice!' she demanded. The Doctor and Jo placed themselves between the guards and Alice as the soldiers tried to arrest her and take her away.

'You seem to have forgotten something, High Priest Karven,'

smiled Alice sweetly as she passed the bag of gold to the bald man.

The Doctor turned to the crowd. 'You have seen what happened

here today,' he cried. 'So I ask you, the people, who do you think should be the rightful queen? Princess Sophia or Princess Alice?'

Lisa's mother paused. 'Who do you think the crowd chose?'

'Alice!' Lisa said with certainty. 'But you haven't told me what

else Jo found in the temple!'

'All in good time.'

The crowd yelled: 'Alice! Alice! Alice!'

The Doctor looked at the guards. 'If you must arrest anyone, it should be Sophia.'

But Sophia, on hearing the first chants from the crowd, had

already gone.

Jo stepped up to the Doctor. 'It looks like someone dug a hole at the back of the temple. I think that's how Sophia found out what was 218

inside.'

'I think we should keep that to ourselves,' the Doctor replied. 'Or they might think Alice did it. Look after the princess for a while, will you? I have a couple of errands to run.'

As Lisa's mother described Alice's coronation, she placed a blanket around her daughter to symbolise the ermine robes that surrounded

Alice and placed an imaginary crown on her head.

'But where did the crown come from for the coronation?' Lisa

asked. 'I mean, if there was no crown inside the temple?'

When the Doctor returned, he had a plastic supermarket bag

containing a crown, sceptre and mace, which he gave to the priests for the ceremony.

After the coronation, the Doctor approached Alice as she sat on her throne. 'I would very much like my yo-yo, sweets and umbrella back in exchange for the crown, sceptre and mace,' he said with a smile.

Alice replied: 'I would prefer it if you took the crown, sceptre and mace, as well. I think they reflect Sophia's style of rule more than my own. I don't want to be set apart. I want to be one of the

people...'

Lisa piped up, 'He used his time machine, didn't he, Mummy? I

thought that was against the rules!'

'He often spoke about rules and laws, but I think that he probably made them in the first place!'

'But, Mummy, what about the coins? How did she know they

were there if that wasn't part of the plan?'

‘Maybe their grandfather was right. Perhaps a real princess does have real magical powers after all.’

‘Did they live happily ever after?’

‘I expect so. Eventually.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘That, young lady, is another story for another day.’

‘What story?’ When a story finished, Lisa would ask as many questions as possible to delay its end.

‘Sophia’s revenge and how the Doctor and I helped Queen Alice to defeat her once and for all!’

Lisa smiled to herself. Her mother had used the word “I” when answering the question. But before she could say anything a tall, older man with a funny moustache entered the room.

‘Lisa!’ he exclaimed, smiling. ‘Here’s a special glass of lovely hot milk for you. Just the thing for adventurers to drink before they go to bed. I expect you’re tired after your mother has been filling 219 your head with silly stories.’

Lisa smiled. At five, almost six, she might be a long way from being grown up, but she knew that her mother’s stories were far from silly.

Lisa looked at the older man who her mummy called Alistair, or sir – which was always by accident – or something like ‘Bridget-dear’. She knew he knew all about the stories, too.

She made a decision and smiled up at the older man. It was true that she was not a grown up yet, but she knew that at times being a

little girl was a powerful thing. Now she would go to bed like they wanted, because tomorrow she was determined to do some exploring and find a way to hear some more stories about the Doctor, and maybe even find out some other secrets too...

220

Mardi Gras Massacre

Arnold T Blumberg

An adventure of the Sixth Doctor, with Peri

Time has a smell. 'A symphonic olfactory amalgam of scents and aromas,' as the Doctor put it – flora and fauna, perfume and cologne, food and drink. A new combination of odours greeted Pen whenever the TARDIS doors opened and she set foot into a new time and place. It was always exhilarating. As she strolled with the Doctor in New Orleans' bustling French Quarter on Mardi Gras weekend, she knew the Time Lord was just as enthused. He was incapable of keeping such things to himself

'Contrary to popular opinion, Peri, there are some regions of the United States that have managed to achieve a respectable, even refined level of culture,' the Doctor said as they threaded themselves through waves of masked revellers filling the streets. 'This is one of the shining stars in your post-colonial firmament! Mardi Gras! Jazz and Swing! Gumbo! New Orleans is the very definition of passion, Peri!'

The Doctor swept his multicoloured coat sleeves around and nearly smacked a terrified tourist right in the face. Peri pulled the Doctor's hands down, grimacing as he swirled deeper into the

crowd.

‘Honestly, Doctor, do you think you could keep the – excuse me – speeches to a minimum? Aren’t we trying – pardon me – to find a missing alien whatsit?’

‘Mykosian Pod,’ the Doctor corrected. He stepped out of the way as a small float festooned with feathered girls dancing to a lively big-band number rolled past. Several dozen smiling masked figures marched behind, raising banners and tossing confetti into the air.

The Doctor fastidiously swept the bits of paper off his coat – like that’ll help, Peri thought – and withdrew a small device with blinking lights from one of his pockets.

‘The signal is just about gone,’ the Doctor said. The two travellers stepped under a first-floor balcony, its iron railings covered in ribbons and greenery. ‘The Pod is partially organic. You could say we’re hearing its death rattle.’

‘The pilot’s dying?’

‘Possibly wounded, but probably somewhere nearby.’

‘Is it dangerous?’

‘Dangerous? Dangerous!’

Peri flinched. Here he goes again.

‘It is an amphibious being trapped on Earth in 1932,’ the Doctor said, stuffing the device back in his coat. ‘It’s not exactly sightseeing! And Mykosians have been known to stake out new territory. It might be a scout, a prelude to invasion.’

‘But Earth wasn’t invaded by aliens in 1932,’ said Peri.

‘Exactly!’

The Doctor rushed off, leaving Peri wondering if she should just

quietly disappear for an hour or two. If he was going to be in one of those moods this morning, she just wasn’t going to take it. But after only a few moments the Doctor returned with a newspaper. He

turned the pages.

‘But did we have to walk?’ asked Peri. ‘Couldn’t we have come

here in the TARDIS?’

‘For a young, healthy girl, Peri, you seem remarkably averse to a

bit of cardiovascular exertion,’ said the Doctor. ‘The TARDIS is not infallible – unlike myself. Rather than trust it to make such a precise jump in the same time zone, I opted for the more reliable, and I

should add, more physically beneficial, route. The TARDIS will be

fine out there in the swamp. Aha!’

‘Aha what?’

‘Just as I thought,’ he said. ‘Here, buried on page six. Well,

look!’ He thrust the newspaper under Peri’s nose.

‘“Shooting Star Seen Over Bayou”,’ Peri read blandly.

‘“Eyewitnesses in Houma report that on the evening of January

31st, a shooting star was seen in the skies over Bayou Terrebonne.

It was seen to apparently fall to earth, but searchers have been

unable to locate it. Professor Marvin Montfleur of Loyola

University has offered a reward of twenty dollars to anyone locating the meteor.” So it’s still in the swamp?’

‘At this point, I very much doubt it.’ The Doctor yanked the

paper back, turned the page, and directed Peri’s attention to a story about the disappearance of a trapper, also in Terrebonne.

‘I don’t get it.’

‘Typically human. You see patterns in things that aren’t there and then when they are there, you miss them entirely.’

Peri put her hands on her hips, exasperated. ‘So what am I

missing?’

The Doctor sighed. ‘This missing trapper must have found the

crashed Pod and has now become the first victim of our Mykosian

friend.’ The Doctor waved the tracking device under her nose.

‘Mykosian technology, Mykosian biology, it’s all the same thing.

What I don’t understand is why the signal is so scattered.’ He

tapped the box and gave it a shake. ‘Probably a loose polytronic

relay.’

Pelf’s stomach rumbled. The last time she’d eaten was during the

Industrial Revolution and, time travel or not, that meant it had been a while.

‘Can’t we at least stop somewhere and eat?’

‘Very well,’ the Doctor said. Behind them, a sandwich board

propped up just outside a café doorway proclaimed the place as

‘The Legendre Lounge, home of “The Elixir of Life” and other Fine

Food and Drink’.

‘There you are,’ said the Doctor. ‘And only a few steps away.’

The high-ceilinged interior was dim even in the light of day. The

galeries on the floors above created an overhang that kept much of the exterior light from streaming in. Ceiling fans spun rhythmically in the upper reaches, producing a soporific hum and a gentle breeze.

At a back table, a young woman with a chin-length bob of black hair was speaking to group of men and women, all nodding appreciatively. ‘Prohibition can’t knock the wind out of our sails,’ the girl said. ‘No one tells us what to do, not Mr Long and his new state capitol, and certainly not the Feds. We’ll give them a Mardi Gras that will make history!’

A young man in overalls tied with an apron noticed Peri and the Doctor at the door and said: ‘Cassandra! We got customers.’

Cassandra turned, saw the Doctor and Peri and rushed over to them, smiling.

‘What can I get you folks?’

‘My young friend is ravenous,’ said the Doctor. ‘But nothing for me, thank you. I can’t stay.’

‘Off to a Krewe meeting?’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘A Krewe? A float committee? Which one are you with?’

‘None, madam. I am known as the Doctor, and this is Miss Perpugilliam Brown.’

‘Oh, I thought what with the clown costume –’

‘Clown costume! I’ll have you know that on Peleshara Nine, this ensemble –’

‘Is just as loud and obnoxious as it is right here on Earth,’ Peri said. Cassandra didn’t understand, but giggled in spite of herself.

She offered a hand to Peri.

‘Perper?’

‘Peri,’ Peri corrected and shook Cassandra’s hand.

‘Cassandra Legendre,’ she said, flashing a dark look at the

Doctor.

‘Don’t let him get to you. He’s like that with everybody,’ said

Peri.

‘I can see you’ve found a new ally,’ said the Doctor. ‘I pride

myself on never outstaying a welcome. Wait here. I’ll be back

presently.’

‘Don’t hurry,’ Peri said, but the Doctor had already disappeared

out the door and around the corner.

‘So,’ said Cassandra. ‘What can I get you?’

The Doctor strode down the street, glancing at the readings on the device and whirling to and fro as costumed revellers brushed past, laughing and patting him on the shoulder. He managed a tight smirk here and there but, for the most part, the crowds were just an

irritation.

‘I tell you, I am not a magician!’ he bellowed at a petite young

lady in a feathered mask who was absolutely certain he was

hurrying to a performance in a nearby club. ‘Will no one believe

me?’

‘I believe you,’ came the voice behind him. He spun around to

see a black woman with piercing eyes sitting in the doorway of a

hairdresser’s salon. She was wrapped in a deep blue shawl with a

multicoloured cloth wrapped around her head. A small cameo was

nestled in the folds of a crocheted lace collar. She smiled.

‘I am Madame Ledanois. I read the cards. I can tell your future.’

Her accent was thick and melodic.

The Doctor held up his hands with another tight smirk. ‘Thank

you, dear lady, but if there’s one thing I don’t need someone to tell me, it’s the future.’

‘Sometimes it helps to have a different perspective,’ she said and produced a deck of cards, laying them on the small table in front of her. Inlaid in the wood surface was a golden carving of a coiled

snake. She turned over the first card and revealed the figure of

Death.

‘That’s a novelty,’ said the Doctor.

‘Do not be afraid,’ she said. ‘It does not mean literal death, only a change. Perhaps small, perhaps profound.’

‘Yes, that’s something else I know rather well. I think I’ve

wasted enough of your time.’ The Doctor turned to leave.

‘Your shadow approaches,’ she said. The Doctor paused. She

turned over more cards. ‘But that is yet to come. What you seek is closer than you think. Far from home, broken-hearted. Seeking

rescue. Seeking control.’ The Doctor sat down in the chair opposite Madame Ledanois.

224

‘Where is it?’

Slender fingers passed over swords and cups and a full, bright

moon. ‘There is someone meddling in magic, forces they do not

understand. This person must be stopped.’

‘That’s usually where I come in,’ said the Doctor. He reached

over and turned the next card. It was the image of a robed man

crowned by a figure eight.

‘And you said you were not a magician,’ Madame Ledanois said, smiling.

‘I’ve been known to pull a rabbit out of a hat from time to time.’

‘How about this Elixir of Life? I’m game,’ said Peri.

‘No, that stuff can hit you hard if you’re not used to it,’ Cassandra said. ‘You wanted something to eat. We’re famous around here for our gumbo.’

‘I’d love some,’ said Peri, and she meant it. The Doctor seemed obsessed with hunting down gourmet experiences lately, but his tastes were, at best, unreliable. Cassandra retreated to the kitchen, came back with a steaming pot and dished out a bowl.

‘Gumbo comes from *gombo*, or stew,’ Cassandra said. ‘New Orleans is a lot like gumbo, really. It’s a mix of America, France and Spain, Christian and pagan, river and gulf, past and present, the living and the dead. You can feel history pressing down on you here like an herb pressed in a book. I’m lucky to have wound up here.’

‘You’re not a local?’ Peri asked between mouthfuls.

‘I’m distantly related to the Louisiana Legendres but I moved here years ago. Actually, I was running away.’

‘From?’

‘My dad died when I was twelve and my mom remarried. It got, um, complicated…’

‘I’ve done some running away myself,’ said Peri.

‘Frank,’ Cassandra spat the name.

‘Howard,’ Peri said.

‘Then you know. Eventually I realised this was where I wanted to

stay. I even went to school, studied some of the Vodoun traditions under Dr Pitot at the university. Stories of the Loa, of Damballah and Aida-Wedo, the Rainbow Goddess. Magical ways. Old ways.

But then, well, things became a bit familiar. Pitot died.' Cassandra looked away. 'Sometimes you run and you just wind up finding

exactly what you left behind.'

'I've been thinking the same thing myself lately.'

'Really. So what about your Doctor?'

'Long story,' Peri sighed. 'That's really pretty.' She pointed to a charm around Cassandra's neck. The pendant was a brilliant

gemstone wrapped in twine and wire.

' *Gris gris*,' Cassandra said with a smile. '"Powerful magic in a small package". That was what Pitot used to say. He always said

that about *gris gris*, and me too. But don't change the subject. This Doctor.'

'He's an interesting person, that's for sure. Powerful magic in a

big package,' Peri said, miming the Doctor's large frame.

The two women laughed.

'But I don't know,' Peri sighed, wiping her mouth. 'Sometimes

I'm not sure why I'm sticking around.'

'There must be a reason.'

'There used to be.'

'If you want to settle somewhere, New Orleans is special,' said

Cassandra. 'Mr Long is about to open that brand-new state capitol

in Baton Rouge. It's an ugly thing, more New York than Louisiana.

Something built by powerful men to try to control the past, or just bury it. But look outside on a Sunday in Congo Square. The people

gather there rain or shine, just the way they have since the early 1700s. No matter how much some people want to change it, the old ways stay strong.'

Cassandra shook herself

'Listen to me run on,' she said, smiling. 'Pretty soon every working man in town will be knocking down my door to spend his pay and "*laissez les bonnes temps rouler*":

'That's okay,' Peri said, sighing as she glanced out the door to where the noise and madness continued to grow. 'I should go find the Doctor.'

The Doctor and Madame Ledanois slowly made their way through the crowd. He frowned at his tracking device and shook it vigorously.

'Your magic fails you?'

'Sadly, it often does.'

The sound of shattered glass caught the Doctor's attention. In the crowd, a blonde girl in feathers and sequins had dropped her drink and turned from a dark-haired man with aviator goggles loose around his neck. She moved away, her face like stone. The young man frantically asked for help from nearby revellers but soon the Doctor heard the sound of more breaking glass and spied others walking off in a similar fashion.

'They look mesmerised,' said Madame Ledanois.

The Doctor nodded furiously in agreement. 'Of course! Why didn't I think of that?'

'Magic, Doctor?'

‘Of a sort, Madame Ledanois. And the glasses are all identical.

They’re getting their drinks from over there!’

A tall, dark man dressed in exaggerated Haitian garb, eyes staring coldly ahead, was walking slowly through the crowd with a placard

and tray. The Doctor circled around him and patted his hands

together with an ingratiating smile.

‘Do you mind?’ He plucked a glass from the tray as Madame

Ledanois eyed the placard.

“Don’t be a Zombie”,’ she read. “The Elixir of Life puts the

swing back in your step! Courtesy of the Legendre Lounge”.’

‘Legendre Lounge?’ said the Doctor, sniffing the green liquid.

‘That’s Cassandra’s place!’ The Doctor sampled the drink then

shook his head violently.

‘Are you all right?’

‘I’m fine, Madame Ledanois,’ said the Doctor, eyeing the liquid

in the glass. ‘But as for everyone else here, that could be a very different matter, especially if this is what I think it is – and it’s not wormwood.’

‘What is it?’ Madame Ledanois asked.

The Doctor scanned the crowd. In every direction, he saw men

with placards and trays.

‘I think it’s the beginning of an invasion.’

Outside the bar, Peri watched the parade, her fingers gripping an

iron railing until it hurt. This was no fantasy world in some weird, sci-fi universe. This wasn’t Sarn, Androzani Minor or Varos. This

was real. This was Earth. And maybe, just maybe, it was close enough to home.

The thought of leaving had occurred before, especially since the Doctor had changed from a brave young man into an egotistical nightmare. And she'd had plenty of opportunities. But the need to leave the TARDIS behind had never felt this strong. Was it just that desire to run again?

Peri would be here in New Orleans in just over forty years, on a trip with her mother and father – her real father – when she was ten years old. They stayed in a hotel in the French Quarter, only a block or two from where she was standing now. It wasn't Mardi Gras then, but it was still exciting and a little scary. Their hotel room had a high ceiling which made her uncomfortable when she lay in bed at night, looking up into nothing but shadows. But she was happy.

That was before Howard and being truly afraid of the shadows. Of the dark.

Ever since the Doctor changed, she'd been thinking about losing herself in a crowd, starting over. And here it would be so easy. So 227 many people, so much noise and life. She could just step off the kerb and vanish. The Doctor would never find her.

But is running away always going to be the answer? Just one step was all it took.

Peri almost jumped out of her skin as a hand fell on her shoulder.

The Doctor must have utilised his 'unerring sense of direction' and found her.

But it wasn't the Doctor. Peri let out a scream as she turned to see a wild-eyed reveller, his face frozen in a mask of utter emptiness, a claw-like hand gripping her shoulder like steel. She twisted out

from under him and ran, noticing others emerging from the crowd with similar expressions, hands outstretched. She hadn't even noticed that the music was dying away, replaced by the sound of one word echoing again and again.

' *Zombi!* '

The cry came from somewhere in the crowd. By the time the word rang out across Canal and Bourbon and Orleans Street, it was too late. As the march of colourful masked men and women moved forward, glasses shattered as they hit the streets and all those that had sampled the Elixir of Life turned glassy-eyed and stone-faced.

Pleasure turned to panic and the crowd surged in every direction, the revellers transforming from within. The ranks of this Silent Krewe grew stronger, marching out from Bourbon to Ursulines Street then down Royal to every club and bar.

Silver-haired Vic Dupree carefully stubbed out his thin cigar in the copper-coloured ashtray and lifted another film reel onto the machine that filled the movie theatre with light and fantasy every night. The Palace had been built just five years ago, with an interior designed like the courtyard of an Italian villa, greenery decorating its plaster archways and a ceiling painted like a starry night, deep blue and sparkling.

Vic had heard rumours that they would soon be playing only talking pictures, but he loved the movies just the way they were, with nothing but the lilting music from the Robert Morton pipe organ to transport you into another world.

Vic noticed the theatre was filling with patrons, but they weren't seated and talking excitedly prior to the start of a new film or eagerly awaiting the beginning of a live performance. They were

staring at him, shuffling down the aisles toward the proscenium

arch. He caught their wide, fixed stares. Panicking, with his heart pounding, Vic tripped on the steps behind him.

‘Stop! What are you doing? Leave me alone!’

Vic fell back into the keys of the organ, his high-pitched squeal

mingling with the dissonance of his unique composition. The sound

echoed across the courtyard as the audience went to work beneath

the painted stars. And then the screams stopped, leaving only the lilt of the organ.

Just the way Vic wanted it.

The Legendre Lounge was dark. Peri burst through the shattered

front door and found only shadows. Cassandra must have escaped,

or she was already dead. Either way, Peri couldn’t save her new

friend, but she still had to find the Doctor.

On hearing a strange groan from behind, she whirled around to

see several wide-eyed zombies at the entrance staring straight at her, their heads cocked to one side. As if they had heard the same signal, they moved as one into the cafe. Peri raced through to the kitchens at the back, knocking over stools and tables on her way, then

barricaded the door behind her. She found tiled counters lined with cans and glassware, sinks and ovens. Peri could hear the shuffling of zombies filling the café, bottles falling and shattering at the bar as they moved carelessly through. Then the pounding began.

Keeping an eye on the door and desperately trying to ignore the

banging noise, Pen looked for a weapon. Apart from bludgeoning a

few of them at close quarters with a bottle or a pot, there weren’t many promising options. She screamed as the door splintered,

jagged planks of wood exploding inward as her silent pursuers stepped through the ruin and into the kitchen.

It might have been comical if she hadn't been so terrified. Pen gasped at the sight of men and women dressed as clowns and animals, their eyes locked on her, their hands clasping and unclasping in front of them.

'At least say something if you're going to try to kill me!' Peri backed into a corner, ducking under a series of metal cabinets.

Reaching behind her, she grabbed the first thing she felt and threw it at the advancing horde. A can of beans. It hit a man square in the chest. He didn't flinch or slow his pace. Another can hit a woman in the shoulder. She reeled back momentarily then resumed moving forward.

Peri hurled more cans but it was useless. There were a dozen or more of the zombies, and they were so close. Her fingers fell on one last can, and she swung it out from the cabinet. The lid was loose and a cascade of brown powder flew from the open top as she flung it, with more billowing out and clouding the air in front of her. The dust settled and Peri froze. They had stopped.

As the revellers wiped powder from their eyes and blinked in confusion, Peri looked down at her feet where the empty can had

landed. She read the label. 'Chicory!'

Willie Marquand mopped the tiled counter of his sandwich shop and glanced at his watch. Just a few folks eating at the counter, and two couples sitting at the small tables near the back.

But the dinner rush would come soon.

They sure do love Willie's po' boys, yessir. Ain't no one in all of

Louisiana could make a po' boy like Wilhemina Marquand's youngest son, Willie. They come from miles around just to try 'em.

Every day, you could hear Willie calling all the way into the street:

'You want dat dressed?'

A surge of new customers filed in quietly, shuffling into the diner with unblinking eyes and faces like stone. They fell upon Willie's patrons and clawed at them with curled, steely fingers. Willie was trapped behind the counter and could only sob as the silent, staring creatures converged on him. He scrambled back onto the sizzling grill, sending roast beef and onions in every direction. His hands came down on searing metal and he shrieked, but by then scrabbling fingers were already searching for flesh beneath his gravy-stained apron.

Wilhemina's youngest son made sure the po' boys were dressed one last time.

'It's a Mykosian technique,' the Doctor said as he hurried Madame Ledanois down the street. 'Through a biologically produced substance somewhat analogous to that of the puffer fish, they can control the minds of other beings. Hundreds have tried that drink over the last few hours. The Mykosian is asserting control now.'

'They make zombies,' said Madame Ledanois.

'Psychotropically poisoned humanoids under remote telepathic manipulation is a more accurate description.'

'Magic,' said Madame Ledanois.

'You can call it that if you wish,' said the Doctor, 'but we must get back to the Legendre Lounge! Peri may still be there. She may even be one of them!'

The pair stopped short as they encountered a wall of zombies

shambling towards them. Still more came from behind.

‘This way!’ cried the Doctor, heading down a side alley. It dead-ended at the back of the café and the mouth of the alleyway was blocked by the advancing horde.

‘Not one of my better strategies.’ The Doctor withdrew the tracking device and waved it at their pursuers. ‘Look, flashing lights!’ He threw the device, but it careened off the head of one ornately dressed prince and landed on the ground.

230

‘I think you were right, Madame.’

‘About what?’

‘My magic has most definitely failed me.’

The zombies shuffled closer, grasping at the Doctor and Madame Ledanois.

A door next to them burst open. Peri leapt into the alley from the cafe kitchens, brandishing a canister.

‘Peri, what are you doing?’

‘Stand back, Doctor! I know just the thing for this brand of voodoo!’

‘If I’ve told you once I’ve told you a thousand times, Peri, there is no such thing as magic!’

‘Have a little faith, Doctor!’ Peri waved the can back and forth, its open mouth spewing brown powder into the faces of the zombies. As they blinked and staggered back, Peri handed cans to the others. They clouded the alley with powder and watched as the

revellers came to their senses, blinking and gazing in confusion at their surroundings. Madame Ledanois nodded quietly as she dusted herself off. The Doctor was nonplussed.

‘A perennial herb known as blue sailors or coffeeweed,’ said Peri triumphantly. ‘Commonly called chicory.’

The Doctor approached Peri and she flinched. But he clapped his hands on her arms and gave her a big grin.

‘Brilliant, Peri! At least we know we can reverse the effects of the so-called elixir.’

‘That’s what’s causing all this?’ Peri said.

‘Yes, and that poor girl Cassandra may have been one of the creature’s first victims, distributing this laced libation under orders from a powerful alien mind.’

‘I guess that makes sense,’ Peri said. ‘Everybody’s getting drunk on the Elixir of Life, so all we have to do,’ she smiled and hefted the can of chicory, ‘is sober them up!’

‘I simply don’t understand it,’ said the Doctor. A search of the kitchen had uncovered nothing, and the group had gathered back in the café proper. The Doctor paced furiously. ‘I was convinced the Mykosian would be here!’

‘If you are seeking something or someone hidden, the first place you should look is the last place you would consider,’ advised Madame Ledanois.

‘Prohibition!’ Peri said. ‘Don’t they have all kinds of speakeasies with secret doors and passwords?’

‘Indeed they do, Peri,’ said the Doctor, trying to look everywhere at once. ‘Furrows on the floor!’ He pointed at a pair of parallel

tracks faintly etched into the floor, leading all the way from the front of the café to the wall behind the bar. The Doctor knelt and ran his fingers along the surface, finding a seam and pressing on the hidden catch that opened a secret door at the back of the café.

‘Probably meant for storing contraband,’ said the Doctor. ‘The

perfect hiding place. All of you stay here.’

Madame Ledanois regarded the opening warily. Peri hovered

nearby as the Doctor stepped into the dark. Retrieving a torch from his coat, the Doctor aimed the slender beam in every direction,

revealing barrels, stacks of boxes and loose bottles. In the darkest corner was a small cage shoved between two kegs. A figure

cowered inside, moaning quietly. ‘Peri! Bring some cloths and

water!’

A few minutes later, the Doctor and Peri were crouched near the

creature. Released from its cage with the help of the Doctor’s sonic lance, the reptilian gulped greedily at the glass of water Peri offered it while the Doctor wrapped its arm with a dish towel.

‘It never occurred to me,’ the Doctor said, grunting as he pulled

the towel tight ‘I assumed the Mykosian was causing all this

mayhem as part of a strategic advance. But it’s as much a victim as those poor souls on the streets.’

‘Those wounds on its arm,’ said Peri.

‘Yes, scorch marks around one of them. Happened in the crash.

But the others are deeper cuts and more recent.’ The Doctor looked around and found a knife lying near the cage. He held it up,

showing Peri the green stains on the blade.

‘It’s been methodically drained of blood,’ the Doctor said with a

grimace as he helped the Mykosian stand up. ‘The source of this

abhorrent “Elixir of Life”. That explains the weak and diffuse

signal. Mykosian life signs scattered all around the French Quarter as the first of the zombies distributed the drink.’

‘But that means the Mykosian wasn’t behind this at all!’

Cassandra had been collecting herbs when she found it.

The strange craft must have landed softly in the swamp, its spiky exterior half shrouded in branches and reeds. Steam leapt from its surface and curled upwards into the night sky. At the base of the swiftly disintegrating pod, lying partly outside an oval aperture, was a monster. Human in shape, but obviously some kind of reptile

– scaly, green, covered in nub-like spikes. It seemed to be asleep.

No, it was unconscious.

One of the creature’s arms was outstretched, reaching towards

the water. A greenish fluid trickled from a wound on its arm,

running off into a pond and turning it into a dowdy pool. Across the 232

pond, kneeling by the water’s edge and staring dead ahead, was a trapper, a trickle of milky water dripping from his chin.

The flash of something bright caught Cassandra’s eye. A

beautiful jewel, woven in wire and twine and hanging from the

creature’s neck. She reached out tentatively, then snatched the pendant and placed it around her own neck. Her hands flew to her head as her mind reeled with unfamiliar images.

Something was reaching into her mind, something aggressive,

driven to control, to conquer. It found images of gods and

goddesses.

It found her anger. It fed upon her thoughts, strengthening the anger, focusing it, until Cassandra’s mind became clear. Suddenly everything made so much sense, she realised. At last, a chance to make things right! I

can use this power to save the old ways, protect them from all those powerful men that want to bury them under

concrete and glass and cruelty and pain.

But first, I will have to move this creature, take it back to the café and keep it hidden. How?

The trapper stood and moved towards her. She started, but he

walked past her and effortlessly lifted the creature from the water.

He stood with it in his arms, Loaning. For orders. She could sense it.

Cassandra approached him. That creature's blood is a magical

potion, an elixir, she thought. This foolish man drank water mingled with its blood and it's changed him somehow. It's turned him into a zombie.

The Silent Krewe marched under moonlight. The parade of revellers

dressed in costumes of a hundred different colours, some with fresh blood on their hands, followed the rainbow-swathed figure leading

the way to the river's edge. Cassandra lifted one arm and pointed to a tugboat and barge awaiting them at the end of a short dock. In

single file the harlequins, princes, princesses and domino-masked

minions walked onto the barge as the water lapped lazily at the

wooden planks. The rhythmic splashing was punctuated by the

sound of drums, distant but distinct, regular as a heartbeat.

Cassandra untied the rope tethering the boat to the dock. As she

moved to board the boat, the putter of a motor car cut through the night. Who was this?

The car jolted to a halt near the dock and the passengers piled out.

The Doctor was first, then Pen. Madame Ledanois shut off the

motor and emerged from the driver's side. Peri smiled at her.

'Now that's what I call a hot rod!'

Madame Ledanois looked quizzically at Pen, but the Doctor's attention was elsewhere. 'Not now, Peri,' the Doctor said.

Cassandra marched toward them, head held high, her rainbow dress shimmering around her. She smiled.

'And to what does Aida-Wedo owe this grand farewell?'

'Aida-Wedo?' said the Doctor, jamming his hands in his pockets. 'As in the Bride of Damballah?' Peri looked at him in confusion, but Cassandra stood tall and nodded.

'I am the Rainbow Goddess given form on this Earth,' she said. 'The Loa sent me an elixir to create my followers. I am protector of the old ways.' Her hand reached for the pendant around her neck.

Madame Ledanois looked horrified. 'The old ways? You have no idea what magic you are playing with,' she said.

'You are wrong,' sneered Cassandra. 'I know very well what I'm doing.'

'I must agree with Madame Ledanois, Cassandra,' said the Doctor, stepping forward. 'You are hardly Aida-Wedo. That pendant around your neck is the problem.'

'No closer,' said Cassandra. Several of the zombies on the barge turned and came ashore, surrounding their mistress. 'How did you find me?'

The Mykosian stepped from the back of the car and shuffled towards them. Peri saw that Cassandra looked worried.

'I had a chat with your unwilling guest,' said the Doctor. 'Or

perhaps I should say a mind-link. That pendant is a focusing

generator, used by Mykosians to project their natural abilities across great distances. Wearing that allowed you to control your

“zombies”, but it’s a two-way transmitter. Your prisoner has been

aware of your thoughts. Besides, your army isn’t exactly fleet of

foot, is it?’

‘None of that matters,’ hissed Cassandra. ‘You will all die, then I will take my army to Baton Rouge and bring the new state capitol to the ground. My empire on Earth will begin there and spread to

every nation. A kingdom of the undead!’

‘Very ambitious,’ said the Doctor. ‘But not original. That

generator retains an imprint of the basic Mykosian drive to conquer and colonise. It’s manipulating your memories and emotions into

something it can use to drive you to fulfil its mission!’

‘She’s mad,’ said Pen.

‘Yes,’ said Cassandra. ‘Very mad. And you should know. Join

me, Peri! We can take control! No more Franks, no more Pitots. No

more Howards!’

‘This isn’t the way,’ snapped Peri.

‘But this is what will be! Come with me, Peri!’

‘No! This time, running away isn’t the answer,’ Peri said. ‘None

of this is. It’s sick, perverted and wrong. You don’t have the right to take these people’s lives.’

‘Then you’ll die with the –’

Cassandra reeled, gripping the pendant as she staggered back.

Behind the Doctor, the Mykosian had closed its eyes and stretched

out an arm, fingers grasping the air.

‘Give it up, Cassandra!’ the Doctor said. ‘Contact with the

generator has poisoned your mind, but this isn’t your fault. You can still –’

‘I *am* Aida-Wedo!’ Cassandra rasped. ‘You are a demon sent in a coat of many colours to confuse me! But I see through your

harlequin guise to the black heart within! The shadow in your soul!’

Cassandra fell to her knees. The other zombies marched from the

barge back to shore. Cassandra held her head in pain and waved

weakly at the Doctor and his friends.

‘Kill them! Tear them to pieces!’

But the marching revellers did not move forward. They

surrounded Cassandra instead, moving into a tighter circle.

‘I don’t think they’re yours to command any more, Cassandra,’

the Doctor said with a smile.

Cassandra shrieked in protest, tears filling her eyes, as the

zombies moved closer.

The Doctor’s smile faded as he looked to the Mykosian. Its

yellow eyes were now open and staring coldly ahead.

‘No, wait! Don’t do this!’ The Doctor forced his way into the

closing circle, pushing aside the mindless minions as they advanced on Cassandra. He looked at the Mykosian as it compelled

Cassandra’s army to turn on their queen.

‘You were shown no friendship, no mercy, when you arrived

here, but this is not how it has to be!’ said the Doctor. ‘It can stop here and now! With you.’

The zombies raised their hands, fingers curled into claws.

Cassandra was on the ground, shrieking, hands and arms covering her head and face. The Doctor snatched the pendant from her neck.

Cassandra screamed and collapsed, but the Doctor held the pendant up, showing it to the Mykosian. Peri made to move forward but the Doctor stopped her with a look.

'The Mykosian must choose, Peri, or the violence will never end.'

The reptilian let out a blood-curdling wail that echoed across the river. Peri shivered but stood her ground next to Madame Ledanois.

The creature balled up its fists and bowed its head. Then it uncurled its fingers.

The zombies lowered their arms and broke the circle, then gently collapsed to the ground as if asleep. The Doctor smiled at the Mykosian.

'Thank you.'

The alien nodded. The Doctor looked at the pendant.

' *Gris gris*,' said Madame Ledanois.

'Powerful magic in a small package,' said Peri. She took the pendant from the Doctor and gave it to the Mykosian. 'But what about Cassandra?'

'Cassandra's been wearing that generator for over a week,' said the Doctor. 'But she's no Mykosian. The strain on her mind was too great, and there's no shielding in a human brain from the psionic backlash.'

‘It’s driven her mad?’ asked Madame Ledanois.

‘I’m afraid so.’

‘They’re all around me,’ Cassandra was rocking back and forth.

‘Grasping hands, piercing eyes! Oh! Oh!’

‘Not all monsters walk in the open air,’ the Doctor said.

‘She was running from monsters,’ Peri said, ‘but she created some herself. She even became one.’ Peri shivered. Just one step was all it took.

‘She’s no monster,’ said the Doctor. ‘She may well recover with the proper assistance.’

‘I will help her,’ said Madame Ledanois. She took Cassandra’s shoulders and helped her up. ‘I will try to make her whole again.’

‘But that crazy idea of building an army and taking over the capitol,’ said Peri. ‘If that came from the generator, then the Mykosian *was* here to take over Earth!’ Peri shot a look at the Mykosian. It stared mutely back.

‘Nonsense,’ the Doctor said. The generatorwas operating independently while the Mykosian was incapacitated and grafted itself to another consciousness. You could say it fell into “default mode”. But the Mykosian crashed here on its way somewhere else. It just wants to go home. Not every alien race in the universe wants to invade Earth, Peri.’

‘But that’s what you thought when we first got here,’ Peri said.

‘So you aren’t infallible then?’

‘I am invariably infallible,’ said the Doctor petulantly. He glanced sideways at Peri and the corners of his mouth slipped

upwards. ‘Except when I’m not.’

The Doctor’s Krewe marched to the sound of cheering voices and braying trumpets. He had resisted the role of King and fought the suggestion that he wear a ridiculous hat with a feathered plume, but 236

Madame Ledanois and Peri had worn him down. Peri was named Queen and crowned with a garland of blue sailors. Then the Krewe was ready to roll.

Golden lights lit up the French Quarter from Bourbon to Basin Street. Flowers and beads arced through the air as the Krewe kept in step with the rousing Dixieland tune that wafted through the air alongside the aroma of gumbo and chicory. Plenty of chicory.

Peri looked from one side of the street to the other and saw faces glowing with life. The same eyes that had stared soullessly at her a short time ago were now vibrant and sparkling. It was good to know there were happy endings, Peri thought.

No one would know about the Mardi Gras massacre of 1932. Peri didn’t remember it from any history books. The Doctor suggested that a powerful man like Huey Long would sweep it all under the rug before the critical unveiling of his new state capitol.

‘Time has a way of smoothing the rough edges,’ said the Doctor. ‘And sometimes, human beings do it entirely on their own.’

Peri laughed at the Doctor’s unwavering mask of determination. He was taking his role as Krewe leader seriously, but it was hard to do the same for him with that silly hat perched on his mop of golden curls.

The Doctor caught her eye and allowed himself another smile. It grew into a wide grin, teeth and all, and Peri grinned back. Together

they led the revellers into the night. Peri stayed by his side right to the end.

237

What Has Happened to the

Magic of ‘Doctor Who’?

VIII

Gareth Roberts

Alissa Ashanti-Johnson

BBC, Producer, ‘Doctor Who’

24th November 2063

Dear Ms Ashanti-Johnson,

I’ve just synchronised my HeadPod with the latest series of ‘Doctor Who’, and I feel I must beam this message to you. I have a spare

minute while my nanite spray does its business and the teleport

warms up.

Unfortunately, Ms Ashanti-Johnson, I can’t pretend to have

enjoyed the series. Is this really what we pay £3,658 licence fee a year to the BBC for? I am a lifelong fan of’Doctor Who’ and have

downgridded all 500 previous stories into my HeadPod (yes, even

those strange colourless ones they thought had been lost but turned up in 2049 underneath that abattoir) but the new series leaves a lot to be desired in comparison.

It’s the hundredth anniversary, for Dawkins’ sake. But instead of

giving us the 23 Doctors special we all wanted, you’ve served up

something that has ruined the magic of the programme. Early

showrunners of the series such as Russell T Davies, Steven Moffat, the malfunctioning BBC robot double of Steven Moffat and

Peaches Geldof would all be ashamed of what you've done.

For a start, the new Doctor is far too clean-cut. Where is the

leering, winking and cheeky pinching of bums that we associate the character with? And what has happened to the TARDIS? It used to

travel anywhere in time and space, but in this new series it hardly seems to leave the solar system. Setting stories in familiar places like Jupiter and Neptune is simply boring and unimaginative.

I shan't be synching any more episodes. A hundred years on, the

magic of 'Doctor Who' has finally been destroyed.

Mohammed Levy-Smith, London SE4/A5

238

Blessed are the Peacemakers

Caleb Woodbridge

An adventure of the Fourth Doctor, with Sarah Jane

Night was falling and there was little light from the city of

Damietta. Hasculf stood, looking towards it from the fortifications of the camp. He was glad that his watch was now, in the relative

cool of the evening, rather than in the oppressive heat of the

Egyptian summer. Behind him lay the assembled armies of

Christendom, with all the clatter and calls of people going about

their business, legitimate or otherwise, in every tongue from

English to Italian, Frankish to Hungarian. Across the still of the evening, he could hear the sounds of soldiers checking their

weapons, tradesmen and women selling their wares and their wiles,

priests muttering darkly together. In front of him, beyond the reeds and dry dust, the walls of the city rose sharply, a stern reminder of the difficulty of their Crusade.

To the west lay the river, one of the many branches of the Nile,

and the tower guarding it, which they had captured some months ago. Surely it was only a matter of time before the city itself fell to their forces? He hoped so. He had taken the vow to come and fight for the freedom of the Holy Land as much out of a desire to see the world beyond the fields that surrounded his village as anything else.

But the harsh realities of the long and wearisome journey to these far-off lands, and the irregular but frequent and brutal bursts of combat, had long since turned his wanderlust into homesickness.

He still wished he could have seen the holy city of Jerusalem, but King Richard himself had said before he died that the capture of Egypt was the key to the Holy Land, and so Hasculf had to content himself with the strategies that his lords and commanders thought best.

Hasculf frowned. A new noise could be heard above the sounds of the camp, a rattling, like the sound of many shields clattering against each other all at once. He scanned the area between the camp and the besieged city, but he could see no sign of movement, nothing to suggest that the Saracens were approaching. And yet that sound was growing louder all the time, faster, almost like a buzzing.

He looked up. There, silhouetted against the rich twilight of the

evening sky, flying through the air towards them, were dozens of creatures, each larger than any man. They hung from what looked like black wings, buzzing ever louder as they got closer.

‘To arms!’ Hasculf shouted, drawing his sword. ‘We are under attack!’

Shouts went through the camp, a wave of sudden activity as the Crusader army stirred into action. A moment later, the creatures fell

upon the camp, landing in groups of three or four, while still more flew overhead. These weren't just mindless beasts, however terrible. They moved together with purpose, chattering away with clicking mandibles to each other. Some of them wore what appeared to be robes around their middle, and they all carried weapons, wooden staves and spears held by dextrous claws.

This was dark magic, and Hasculf was terrified as he parried blows from one of the advancing creatures wielding a heavy staff. What else could these creatures be but demons from the pits of hell? Everyone knew the Muslims were unbelievers but to have the power to summon up the very servants of Satan was surely beyond even them.

Around him, the men of the camp were rallying to its defence. But, as Hasculf found when he landed a blow against the creature's body, they seemed to have a tough armour that was as effective as any of metal the Crusaders might possess. He could hear the gasps of dismay as people came up against this new and unnatural foe.

Another wave of the creatures descended from the sky. Hasculf was distracted by the sight of one of his comrades, Henricus from Venice, being grabbed and lifted up into the air. But he was not so distracted that he did not see another of the creatures make a grab for him, and rolled out of the way. Twisting round, he came face to face with yet another of the demons. It exhaled a greenish cloud from its mouth, causing him to choke. Everything went blurry, and he felt himself going limp and falling to the ground. But he didn't reach it, and the last thing he remembered before he lost consciousness was seeing the camp disappearing rapidly beneath

him.

With the sound of the laws of physics complaining, a large, blue box slowly faded from nothing into shadow into solidity. A sign above the door claimed, somewhat improbably, that it was a Police Box. The door opened, and a curly-haired man appeared with a broad, floppy hat on his head. He looked around with wide eyes. A smiling young woman with brown hair stepped out next to him.

‘I expected Egypt to be sandier,’ said Sarah, looking at the lush vegetation and palm trees all around them. The air was humming

with insects, and the quiet rustle of the wind in the trees was punctuated by the sharp cries of waterfowl. A little further off, she could see the edge of a wide river. Travelling with the Doctor was always a bit of a lottery, she thought.

‘This must be the Nile delta,’ said the Doctor, taking an enthusiastic sniff of the hot marshy air. ‘That, or we’ve arrived on a swamp planet. Either way, we’ve got some travelling to do if we’re to see the Pyramids.’ Despite the sun being directly overhead, the Doctor was still wearing a long multicoloured woolly scarf. He threw a loose end of it over his shoulder and marched off in the direction of the river.

‘Come on!’ he called back. ‘Let’s explore.’ Sarah hurried to catch up, fanning herself in the heat with a bright pink hat She smiled despite herself. The Doctor’s enthusiasm was never less than contagious.

‘Let’s hope this time we won’t have any robot mummies to deal with,’ she said.

‘Don’t worry. The TARDIS says we’re in the Middle Ages, and there shouldn’t be too much in the way of alien interference in your planet just at the moment,’ said the Doctor. ‘Just beware of the hippopotamuses. Or should that be hippopotami?’

‘Why, are the hippopotamuses aliens?’

‘No, just very bad tempered.’

‘So what is going on here at the moment, then?’ Sarah asked brightly. ‘Any wars or invasions we should watch out for? Any plagues or disasters, or big historical events we can’t possibly alter?’

‘Now you come to mention it – ah,’ he said, his brow furrowing. He stopped as he noticed in the distance a number of men on horseback riding towards them purposefully. ‘Judging from the sight of these fine fellows bearing down on us, I’d hazard a guess we’ve arrived during the Crusades.’

‘What’s the betting they accuse as of some terrible crimes or something?’ Sarah whispered to the Doctor as the knights circled round them, horses stamping, bridles jangling.

‘That’s a very pessimistic view of human nature, thinking they’ll point the finger at us just because we’re strangers,’ the Doctor began to protest. ‘Have some faith, Sarah.’

‘You! Who are you? What do you know of the black magic that has been performed on these shores?’ demanded one of the group, pointing his sword at the two of them. His face was hidden by his helmet, which had a flat top and only a narrow slit for the eyes. His armour seemed better polished, and the cut of his clothes somewhat

above that of the other soldiers, their faces also hidden behind their metal masks, and Sarah guessed he must be the leader of the group.

'Ah well, never mind,' sighed the Doctor. 'Magic, you say? Terribly sorry, I can't help you there. I'm the Doctor, and this is Sarah. We're just a couple of travellers, pilgrims, you might say, and we're a little lost. Looking for the Pyramids, you know. Large, pointy things. You can't miss them.'

'This land of Egypt is the stronghold of the Muslims,' said the knight, though he sounded more curious than condemning. 'What business would a pilgrim have visiting the tombs of pagan kings?'

'Oh, I'm from a very special order of monks, the order of Saint Rassilon of Kasterborous,' said the Doctor with a grin. 'My vocation is to seek truth and knowledge throughout the world.'

Sarah raised her eyebrows. She couldn't imagine the Doctor making a very good monk.

'Kasterborous? Is that in Greece?' said the knight, lowering his sword. 'That would explain your eccentric clothing. Whatever you are, you don't look like Muslim spies or sorcerers, and you speak German well enough.' The man removed his helmet to reveal a red-bearded man in middle age. He wiped his brow, which was shining with sweat like a pebble just taken from water. 'I am Count Otto of Henneberg, and if you desire protection in travelling to our camp, my sword and shield are at your service.'

'Thank you, that's very kind,' said Sarah, stepping forward. 'What's this magic you're worried about?'

'Your lady friend is a bold one. A monk and a woman travelling

together seems most improper,' said Count Otto to the Doctor with a dirty chuckle. Sarah looked about to make some cutting remark, but the Doctor frowned, and she held back her retort. 'Haven't you heard? The false priests of the Muslims summoned up demons to attack our camp, carrying off many of our men. They appeared from somewhere in this area, and so we suspect that this is where they did their foul magic.'

'Really? Demons?' said the Doctor, his eyes growing wider than usual. 'Could you describe them?'

'I saw them with these eyes – we all saw them. I fought them with this arm and this sword, and I saw friends carried off into the air to regions unknown. I'd scarcely have believed such a tale myself if I hadn't witnessed it,' said the Count. 'They were insect-men, like the beetles that crawl in the dust and dung, but giants, and terrible to look at.'

'How curious. You know, I've performed the odd exorcism in my time, cast out a demon here, dispelled an evil spirit there,' said the Doctor. 'The monks of Saint Rassilon are known for it. If you take us to your camp, then perhaps we'll be able to be of some

assistance?'

'We need all the help we can get,' admitted Count Otto, though he looked far from convinced that the Doctor and Sarah could be any help. 'As if we don't have enough mad monks wandering around,' he added to himself.

'Can't we ever land somewhere where aliens aren't invading?' Sarah asked the Doctor.

‘Where would the fun be in that?’

Haggard faces, sheltering in the shade, turned to watch as the Doctor and Sarah rode with the knights into the camp.

The afternoon sun was beating down on the gathered tents and hastily constructed defences. All was quiet, just the occasional sound of metal scraping metal as a soldier slowly sharpened his sword. The camp sprawled into the distance, and the smell of old food and sweat hung stale in the air.

‘As you can see, our camp is not a happy place,’ said Otto, as they dismounted. People sat around, crouched with arms wrapped around their knees, and rocking backwards and forwards, muttering to themselves. As they watched, two men in rough brown robes with dirty ropes as belts, obviously monks, came round and forced a few drops of water into their lips from gourds. Sarah knelt down by a young man, about twenty years old, his eyes wide. Some flies landed on his face but he didn’t flinch. She brushed them oft Again, there was not the slightest reaction.

‘All is one,’ he muttered, and then kept repeating this strange mantra. ‘All is one. All is one. All is one.’

‘What’s happened to these poor people?’ Sarah asked, looking up at the count

‘Cursed. It started when the demons arrived, spreading among the camp like a plague,’ said Otto grimly. ‘We have no way of understanding those strange words they’re chanting, some spell or incantation perhaps.’

Sarah looked questioningly at the Doctor who drew himself

closer to whisper to her.

‘They’re not saying it in any human language,’ the Doctor murmured. ‘The TARDIS recognises it, but I don’t. They’re under some kind of mental control. But why?’

A mournful note rang out across the camp, from a horn or bugle. Count Otto and his knights leapt back onto their horses, which twisted and snorted as they were spurred hurriedly into action.

‘Find cover! We’re under attack!’ shouted Otto, and the men thundered off in the direction of the call. Sarah looked over at the Doctor for a moment. She nodded to him, and at once they set off at

a run after them. Around them, knights and soldiers grabbed swords and spears. Those afflicted by the so-called curse were forgotten for the moment and were themselves oblivious to all that was going on around them. The horn sounded again above the hubbub.

‘What are you going to do?’ Sarah asked, as the Doctor can forward.

‘Try to talk to them, of course,’ he said. ‘Have a quick introduction, find out who we’re dealing with.’

‘They’re here!’ came the cry. In her travels with the Doctor, Sarah had been present at several battles and knew the atmosphere of sick anticipation just before the fight swept over people like an incoming tide. But the faces of everyone around her, the advancing soldiers, fleeing monks, traders and women, were filled with another expression, the dread of the unknown, that primal fear of the alien and inhuman.

In the confusion, Sarah found that the Doctor was no longer

beside her. She arrived to see half a dozen groups of giant beetles, all armed with spears, by the edge of the camp, faced with a group of soldiers, led by Count Otto on horseback. Between them stood a

man, who stepped towards the nearest beetle, arms stretched out. As he walked towards the creature, he regarded it with a slow and

steady gaze, not of fear or disgust, but of curiosity. For a moment, Sarah wondered if it was the Doctor, but this man wasn't as tall, and he wore the ragged clothes of a monk. The giant beetle twitched its antennae, seemingly watching him cautiously. The monk began to

speak, but in all the noise Sarah couldn't make out what he was

saying. Who was he?

But before Sarah could wonder about it further, she found herself

suddenly tightly gripped and lifted from the ground. She screamed

as she dangled helplessly, pulled up with dizzying speed. The other beetles took to the sky, leaving those below staring upwards. She

thought she caught a glimpse of the Doctor, bellowing after her

loudly, before she blacked out.

'Sarah!' shouted the Doctor. 'Bring her back!' But it was too late.

The attackers were rapidly disappearing from sight.

'They're beautiful,' murmured the wide-eyed monk who was

standing next to him. 'Did you see their wings shining in the light, like water beaten into sheets, as they took off? What are they?'

'Some kind of giant coleopteroid life form, though that probably

doesn't mean much to you,' said the Doctor, squinting after the

massive beetles. They had flown north, across the city of Damietta.

'And they've taken my friend.'

'I'm sorry to hear that,' said the monk. The words were ordinary

and, in another mouth, they could have been a mere platitude. But there was something in the way he said them that made the Doctor turn to look hard at the man standing next to him. The monk was in his mid-thirties with a worn look about him. His robes were poor and unwashed and he wasn't wearing any sandals, and the Doctor took to him immediately. The monk had spoken without a hint of insincerity or artifice, but with an unusual wholeheartedness. 'I pray that you will find her again,' he said, 'and if there is anything in my power I can do to help, I will do so.'

'I'm the Doctor, by the way,' the Doctor offered. 'Who are you?'

'A wandering pilgrim, hoping to do some good in this place,' he said, with a small smile. 'I am Francis of Assisi.'

Her head pounding, Sarah opened her eyes. She was lying in a large chamber, perhaps in some kind of ship. Above her was a domed roof, with hundreds of the giant beetles swarming around. The noise they made was intense. As for the smell of the place... well, Sarah had waded through trenches on Skaro, but this wasn't far behind.

She picked herself up, taking a look around. She guessed about twenty other people were prisoners, and being kept in the same space as her. Bars running up from the ground caged them, but these twisted up like vines. She gave one a hopeful tug. It looked organic and felt slightly warm to the touch, but it was as tough as iron. There was no need for a roof to their cage as the bars were far too tall to climb. The only way out would be to fly. The dome's walls appeared to be a dense weave of brown branches, with veins of reflective metal running across them, filling in any cracks, and supporting the entire structure.

'We've tried to escape,' said one of the prisoners, a young man with a straggly attempt at a beard, in a hollow voice. 'But there's no

way out.'

'I've got a friend who says there's always a way out,' said Sarah.

'You just need to look hard enough. My name's Sarah. Who are

you?'

'I am Hasculf, from England. These demons, do you know what

they are?' Sarah shook her head. 'They take us away, perform their strange rituals on us,' he said, adding no embellishment to a story he could hardly believe. 'Again and again. Some have been driven

mad, some of them just speak the same strange thing over and over.

They just leave us here, penned up like animals for market. They

still keep coming for me, so perhaps I'm not mad yet. Or perhaps

I've been mad all along.'

'Don't worry, you're not mad,' Sarah said, taking his hand and

squeezing it tight. 'Help is coming.'

245

A group of the creatures descended into the cage. In her travels

with the Doctor, Sarah had learned so much about alien races, and

she scanned them for any differences, any clues to gender, age or

rank. One of the creatures stood in front of the others, and seemed slightly larger. A cloth belt across its front was a rich blue, unlike the plainer brown of the two behind it.

'Take the males,' it said, in a tinkling voice like the jangling of delicate glassware. 'We shall attempt the Mindspell again.'

Hasculf backed away but was seized by four of the giant beetles.

They lifted him into the air. Any resistance was useless as they each held a limb in strong pincers.

'No! Leave him alone!' shouted Sarah. 'What are you going to do

to him?' The beetles slowed, then began to chatter, turning their heads from side to side. The leader advanced on Sarah, its spear raised.

'You speak the language of the Barasci,' it said. 'How is this possible?'

'Francis of Assisi?' repeated the Doctor. 'Of course! You travelled to Egypt on a pilgrimage of peace during the Fifth Crusade! I mean, that is what you are doing right now. How delightful! I've just bumped into one of the few people in this era who don't think the answer to any disagreement is to kill your opponents.'

'You agree with me, Doctor?' said Francis, smiling widely. 'I have preached to the Christians here that, as Christ's followers, we should not come with sword or staff, but in humility. But I am merely indulged, not listened to.'

'I agree on some things, Francis,' said the Doctor. 'On some things.'

'Are you a monk?' asked Francis, puzzled, staring at the Doctor.

'Not exactly. I told some of those military chaps that I'm from the order of Saint Rassilon.' The Doctor leaned in conspiratorially, tapping a finger to his nose. 'But I made it up. I'm actually a man of science, what you'd call natural philosophy. My faith is in what we can see around us and in the use of our minds to understand it.'

Francis nodded thoughtfully, looking at him with interest. The Doctor was used to being the centre of attention, but this was different. Francis's attention seemed total, as if he had forgotten all about himself and could only see the person he was focusing on. Did he take such interest in everyone?

'You're a strange one, Doctor,' said Francis after a moment,

gently putting his hand on the Doctor's shoulder. 'And yet your

heart seems good, and so I welcome you as a friend. My faith is in the one who made what we see around us, and who gave us our

minds. I pray that he will help us through these difficult times.'

'You're very trusting,' said the Doctor solemnly. 'How do you

know I'm not a spy?

'If you are, then I forgive you,' said Francis with equally

solemnity. 'And I would humbly beg you to repent.'

The two of them eyed each other for a moment, and then they

broke into smiles.

'That's very kind of you,' said the Doctor. 'So, what can you tell me about what's going on?'

'Cardinal Pelagius! I didn't realise you were joining us,' said John of Brienne, a powerfully built man in his late forties, raising an eyebrow. Pelagius stood at the entrance of the tent.

'Need I remind you that this is an expedition of the church and, as papal legate, I am in charge?' growled the cardinal as he crossed

over into the centre of the room, among the various commanders.

'If I am faced with continued insubordination, the Pope himself will hear of it!'

'Of course, my liege,' said John, spreading out his arms as if to

protest his innocence.

'Surely this crisis, where we are faced with the very demons of

Hell, should be enough to make you realise that what this Crusade

needs is the power and authority of the Church, and not just your

armies?' said Pelagius, drawing himself up to his full height. 'We must commit ourselves to prayer and fasting, and then launch a

counter attack against the Muslim horde!'

'What you need is to lay aside your differences and talk to the

Sultan,' said the Doctor, strolling in and giving a friendly wave, Francis following close behind him. 'Hello, I'm the Doctor, and this is my new friend, Francis. Anyway, why don't we pop over and

have a chat with Al-Kamil over a cup of tea, and see if he can help us, hmm?' The commanders were on their feet, swords drawn in an

instant. 'Now that's not very friendly.'

'Don't worry,' smiled Francis. 'The Doctor's a friend of mine. I

am confident he's a good man.'

'Who are you? What are you doing here?' demanded Pelagius.

'I'm just a passing monk. Don't mind me,' said the Doctor

cheerily. 'But you ought to listen more to this friar of yours.'

'It is clear,' said Francis, 'that these are no demons. They are also God's creatures like us. We should seek to understand them, to

reason together with them, though their sins may be like scarlet.'

'Francis, I have told you before, you must not come charging into

our councils,' sighed Pelagius. 'Your intentions are always good,

but you must submit to the authority of the Church.'

'I'm sorry, my father,' said Francis, bowing his head. 'But we

must talk to Al-Kamil, discover what he knows about these

creatures and see whether the Muslims have suffered as we have.

And perhaps it may afford me chance to tell him the good news

about our Lord.'

'Your desire to preach to the Saracens is admirable, my son,' said Pelagius. 'But, as I have told you many times, if I let you go, I may

well be sending you to your death.'

'Did that stop Daniel, or Saint Paul, or even our Lord?' said Francis with a gleam in his eye. 'If I may win them to Christ, or even just to peace, then would that not be a worthy sacrifice to make?'

'I've told you no, a hundred times over,' said Pelagius. He looked at Francis and the Doctor shrewdly. 'And yet, against my better judgement, under these strange circumstances, you may go. But some of my soldiers will escort you to the enemy lines for your protection.'

'Thank you, father!' exclaimed Francis. 'But it would be folly to do what Christ forbade, who told his disciples to go with no bag for their journey, no staff or sword at their side.'

'Francis is right. If we carry arms, we'll be killed on sight,' said the Doctor. 'But if we're unarmed, we may win an audience.'

'Very well,' said Pelagius, throwing up his hands. 'On your own heads be it. You have until sunset tomorrow, and then, if you have no success, we will begin our attack. May God go with you.'

Francis beamed, and threw his arms around him, before running enthusiastically out of the tent. The Doctor turned to follow, but Pelagius caught his arm.

'Doctor, I do not know who you are but Francis counts you as a friend and appears to listen to you. I can see you have no wish to become a martyr, and I give you this charge,' Pelagius said in a dark undertone. 'Francis seeks to follow in his Lord's footsteps, even unto death, but it would be a great pity for the friar to be killed. I am a weary man, and the Church needs the zeal of young

men like him. Look after him, Doctor.'

'The flavour of your mind is different from the other humans,' said the chief Barasci. 'The shapes and the ideas are brighter and more varied. You have seen much. You know much. Who are you?'

'My name is Sarah. I travel with a man called the Doctor. He's from another world, like you. We've visited many places,' Sarah said, not sure how much she should reveal. It was usually best to keep quiet about time travel. 'What are you doing here? Why are you attacking the humans?'

'We do not come to fight! We come to bring peace,' insisted the chief Barasci. 'You humans always fighting and killing one another over differences in belief. Thousands have died in this place over the last few months alone. Tens of thousands more will die if the fighting continues.'

'Why are you kidnapping people? Why don't you talk to them?'

'We do not speak their languages,' came the tinkling response. 'We need to learn the shape of their minds, but there are so many languages and so much division. We want to make them all one, just as we are one. We are of one mind. We share all. And we wish for all to share in it.'

'So that's why the injured soldiers in the camp were saying "All will be one",' said Sarah.

'We are testing the Mindspell. When it is complete, there will be no need for talk or capture.'

'Mindspell? What's that?' asked Sarah.

‘We will show the humans the truth, and the truth shall make

them one,’ said the Barasci. ‘Soon, the whole world will believe in the Way. Wars will cease. We will change their minds.’

‘You’ll brainwash them – that’s what you mean!’ said Sarah

indignantly. ‘That’s terrible and cruel! And, worse, it’s not even working!’

‘The difference in their minds has been too great. The Mindspell

has only been able to create the most basic understanding and has

broken many. This is most sad. We are sorry but it is necessary.

With your mind and your ability to understand us, however, you can be the gateway for the Mindspell.’

‘I don’t think so. You’re not using my mind for your little

scheme. I won’t co-operate,’ she protested.

‘We will not force you,’ said the Barasci. ‘Let us persuade you.’

Sarah spun round, realising with horror that a dozen Barasci had

surrounded her. She felt a low buzzing at the back of her head and a pressure mounting in her mind. Psychic attack or some kind of

telepathy, she’d experienced such things before, but her limited

experience wasn’t enough to block whatever the Barasci were

doing. The buzzing in her mind rose higher until all she could think of was the noise, and Sarah screamed.

‘Most exalted eminence,’ said the Sultan’s herald. ‘The guards have picked up two men claiming to represent the Crusader army,

wishing to enter into discussions concerning the recent attacks.’

‘Has that old dog Pelagius agreed to negotiate?’ exclaimed Sultan

Al¬Kamil, stroking his black beard. ‘Tell me more.’

‘They are two monks. One of them goes by the name of Francis

of Assisi, and the other, Doctor of Kasterborous,' he said. 'They seem... eccentric, my Lord.'

'Really? How entertaining,' murmured the Sultan. 'Send them in.'

The Doctor and Francis, blindfolded and their hands tied, were led into the Sultan's chamber. The guards removed their blindfolds and loosened their ropes.

'You are in the presence of al-Malik Al-Kamil Naser al-Din Abu al-Ma'ali Muhammed, Sultan of Egypt and Damascus,' announced the herald. 'You will bow!'

'Greetings to you, mighty one,' said Francis, bowing low. 'Please accept our humble petition to speak freely with you.'

'You Christians claim to follow the teachings of the Injil, of Isa, who you falsely call God,' said Al-Kamil, with a deep voice like the growl of a lion. 'And yet you massacre my people without pity. Everyone knows your camp is swallowed up with debauchery. My priests have been trying to persuade me that these creatures that plague us from the sky are your work. I do not believe that you are capable of such a thing. Why should I listen to you?'

'Much of what you say is true, noble sir, and I am greatly shamed by the conduct of many of those who wear the Cross,' answered Francis. 'I have spent much time preaching to them, calling them to repentance. But let not this be the standard by which you judge the true religion, O Sultan, for Christ did not come to save the righteous, but sinners. If it pleases Your Majesty, let me and one of your priests walk through the fire. Whoever is not burned represents the true and living God, and the other must turn to the worship of that

God. And, please, cast me first into the fire.'

'Francis! This isn't the time for comparative religion or party tricks,' snapped the Doctor. 'We need to find out what they know about these creatures so we can rescue the people who have been captured.'

'You are a brave one, little priest,' said the Sultan, looking at Francis intently. 'But casting you into the fire will not be necessary.'

'But if you give me a chance to show you that the truth is found in Jesus Christ, then we will be able to end this unholy war!' exclaimed Francis.

'The war could have ended months ago had your leaders agreed it,' said Al-Kamil. 'I offered to return Jerusalem, rebuild its walls, hand over the True Cross and sign a truce promising peace for thirty years. Many of the captains of your army would have been happy to accept it, but not Pelagius. He would not deal with those he sees as pagans.'

Francis frowned, confusion written across his face. 'But the purpose of the Crusades is to recover Jerusalem so our pilgrims may have safe passage. Why would he refuse?'

'You tell me,' said Al-Kamil gravely. 'It seems, however, that we are both plagued by a mutual enemy. And I believe that this is not the work of demons or dark magic but some creatures hitherto unknown. Come, tell me what you know.'

'I see it now. I see the Way of Oneness,' Sarah said, picking herself up. She wondered why she hadn't wanted to help the Barasci. 'It's

so beautiful. Thank you, thank you so much.' A small tear ran down her cheek. It all made sense. Everything came from One and returned to One, and the Way was peace and unity. The whole world should be allowed to see this. The whole word had to see this. The Barasci should use their Mindspell to show everyone the truth.

'What do you need me to do?' she asked the chief Barasci.

'It has already begun,' it said, turning to face the assembled Barasci. There were no words, but Sarah felt its command in her mind, enjoying a thrill of excitement as she realised she was sharing in the hive mind of the Barasci. They would pilot their ship to Damietta where they would unite, every mind joining to weave the Mindspell. This would be shared with the city's people and those who laid siege to it. It would spread like a glorious, benevolent virus to all those they came in contact with, until it covered the planet. And Sarah Jane Smith would be at the centre of the Mindspell. She was the conduit through which the wonderful, beautiful truth would be brought to humanity. She felt so proud – but suddenly felt aware of a problem.

'Know this, human Sarah,' said the chief, 'Acting as the conduit is too heavy a burden for one mind. It will kill you. You do not have to do this. It is your choice.'

'I will be the conduit,' said Sarah, without hesitation. 'For the world to know the truth, I'm happy to give my life.'

'It seems you are a learned man, Doctor,' said the Sultan as he and Francis finished describing the attacks on the camp. The Doctor explained that the giant beetles were natural beings rather than supernatural entities, although this had taken some persuasion from

both Francis and the Time Lord. ‘All right,’ continued Al-Kamil,

‘let’s say that I agree with you and these attacks are not the work of magic but of some new foe. How do you intend to locate where

these strange creatures are hiding?’

‘That’s simple. We have an idea of where they are by the

direction from which they attacked the Crusader camp,’ said the

Doctor. ‘If you can tell us the direction from which they attacked your men, then we’ll be able to find their likely location.’

The Sultan nodded and gave orders for his servants to fetch maps.

Men scurried off, returning in moments with detailed maps of the

area, then laying them on a table before them.

‘Sultan, the Doctor and I must bring messengers back with us to

Pelagius,’ said Francis. ‘He will attack if we have not returned by nightfall. The cardinal believes your forces are behind the attacks and we must try to persuade him and the army to unite against our

common foe.’

Some hours later, Al-Kamil sat waiting on a magnificent white

Arab warhorse. It looked like a chess piece carved out of ivory. He warned his horsemen and the archers assembled around him to be

ready for any treachery as a group of Crusader knights approached

in a cloud of dust. ‘Hello!’ shouted the Doctor cheerily, riding a horse alongside Count Otto, who led a group of knights. ‘Pelagius

was reluctant, and wants to keep all this strictly off the record but, in the interests of the greater good, he agreed to send some of his men. Count Otto, this is the Sultan of Egypt and Damascus. Sultan, this is Count Otto of Henneberg. Oh, and Francis has come along

for the ride, too.’ Francis bowed as best he could while sitting on top of a horse. Al-Kamil and Count Otto regarded each other

warily, but saluted respectfully to each other.

‘Doctor, would you say a few words to explain the battle to the men?’ asked Al-Kamil.

‘Oh dear,’ said the Doctor. ‘I hate making speeches. But, if I must.’ He raised his voice. ‘The plan is this: we find the alien base. Francis and I will try to talk to the creatures in an attempt to end the attacks peacefully. If – and only if – we do not return should you launch any kind of attack. Today, you must fight together, not for Christ, nor for Muhammed, but for the men in your armies, the men who are held captive – and possibly even for mankind. By working together, you may preserve the freedom for all to believe as your minds and consciences lead you.’ He looked over at Al-Kamil. ‘There, will that do?’

Sarah stood on a plinth in the centre of the main chamber of the Barasci ship, the prisoners in their cages far below her. The last few Barasci were returning, flying in through the opened roof, which also let the bright sunlight into the shadowy spaces below. As they landed, they stood, waiting on the surrounding walkways and decks, becoming motionless as they joined their minds together, ready to create the Mindspell.

The energy of hundreds of minds flowed through her, all the ideas and beliefs of the Barasci about the Way of Oneness passing through her consciousness. The collective buzz of their minds rose like a song. She could feel the minds of the prisoners below and, as the Mindspell formed and grew, the minds of the thousands of others in the city, and the armies surrounding the city. Soon, their suffering would end as they were united in the Way.

‘Argh!’ cried the Doctor suddenly, twisting his head left then right, as if trying to tip something out of his ears. He drew a sharp breath and turned to the monk. ‘Some kind of telepathic projection! I’ve

tuned it out and you probably can’t hear it, Francis, but it’ll soon begin to affect everyone here.’

‘What are you talking about, Doctor?’ asked Francis. ‘You say so

much I don’t understand, but you have led us truly so far.’

‘A memetic virus! It has to be! The blighters!’ the Doctor said to himself. ‘Those people, Francis, they’re having their minds

rewritten. These creatures, they don’t want to fight, they want to convert everyone to their way of thinking.’

‘How can they do that?’

‘By the power of their minds, I think.’

‘That is dark magic indeed,’ said Francis.

‘No, no, no! It’s just sufficiently advanced science.’ Francis

looked blankly at him, while the Doctor held his gaze. The Doctor’s eyes, Francis realised, were of an incredibly piercing blue. And they were so wide… ‘I don’t have time to explain,’ said the Doctor,

suddenly, leaving Francis feeling a little dazed and wondering what had just happened. ‘We must get inside their ship, base or whatever it is they live inside. And we have to do it before they can complete their plan.’

The two armies broke out into more open swampland, and a large

brown dome rose up, like a giant billiard ball half sunk in mud,

seemingly made of rock. A number of the giant beetles were

swarming around it, keeping guard.

‘Prepare to attack on my order!’ Count Otto shouted to his men.

‘Ready for the signal,’ said Sultan Al-Kamil to his soldiers.

The Doctor nodded to Francis. It was up to the two of them to

prevent any bloodshed, but would the aliens listen? They urged on their horses, speeding off, heading for the strange camp.

'Only a few of these creatures are defending the place,' said the Doctor as he and Francis clambered up the side of the massive hemisphere that seemed a mix of organic and metallic materials.

Behind them they heard the allied armies of the Sultan and Pelagius

fighting the monstrous beetles. The Doctor ignored the battle, took out his sonic screwdriver and pointed it at a panel on the surface of the sphere. It quickly slid open.

'And this is your science? How can this not be magic?' Francis enquired.

'Another time, Francis!'

'Wait – the fighting has stopped!' said Francis, turning from the Doctor. He was shocked to see the two armies were now still. Every weapon had fallen to the ground as each soldier cradled his head in his hands.

'The memetic virus,' said the Doctor grimly. 'It's taking hold. I hope you don't mind, but I slightly hypnotised you earlier. It means you'll be unaffected – for a short while at least. Quick now! Get inside! We need to stop them and we need to find Sarah.'

Francis was growing used to the feeling of confusion whenever the Doctor spoke but he knew that he was a good man and so decided he would follow him, no matter what he did.

They ran down the shadowy, twisting walkways of the ship into a great chamber at the centre, untroubled by the great crowds of giant beetles who all looked enraptured. A hive mind, the Doctor deduced – and perfect for creating a memetic virus.

The Doctor and Francis peered into the centre of the chamber below where they could see Sarah, standing calmly in the middle. The Doctor was suddenly worried. Why were the aliens focusing on her?

'God have mercy on us,' muttered Francis, crossing himself.

'Sarah!' shouted the Doctor, realising what must have happened. 'Are you all right?'

'Keep back, Doctor!' Sarah shouted. 'The Barasci will kill anyone who tries to stop the Mindspell.'

'Mindspell? Is that what these Barasci call it?' said the Doctor in disgust. 'I call it barbarous!'

'They have shown me the Way of Oneness, Doctor. I'm just doing what you're always doing – making the world better!'

'You can't believe that! The Barasci have just reprogrammed you!' said the Doctor.

'When everyone embraces the Way, there will be peace and harmony,' said Sarah, though her voice was somehow flatter, less herself, and it was no longer clear if it was her or the Barasci speaking.

'What if it's not true?' asked the Doctor. 'What if it's just an excuse for an invasion dressed up in some mystical mumbo-jumbo? Shouldn't people make up their own minds?'

'We are certain of the Way,' said Sarah, or the Barasci through

Sarah, if there was now any difference. 'It is truth, absolute truth, and

every world must know it.'

'If it's so certain, why don't you try to convince people by sitting down and chatting to them about it, hmm?' said the Doctor.

'That's all you offer, Doctor – uncertainty and ignorance!' she

said. 'What kind of freedom is that?'

'We're running out of time,' said the Doctor to Francis. 'We need

to stop them using Sarah, and quick!'

'Is there anything else you can do?' he asked. The Doctor shook

his head, looking around desperately. He ran up to what looked like a giant toadstool with hundreds of smaller ones on and around it,

the ends of which glowed a bright red – a control panel. The Doctor began to examine it, scanning it with the sonic screwdriver.

'Aha! I can reverse the psychic directionality so that the mental

energy being generated will be fed back into the Barasci hive mind rather than being directed at the humans.' The Doctor paused, his

face grim. He turned back to Sarah. 'I can stop you. Barasci. Stop this now or I will stop you.'

Francis was incredulous. 'Will you destroy them, Doctor?'

'If there is no other way to stop them,' he said. 'And I've no time to do anything else!'

'So you are a man of violence, Doctor,' said Francis. 'And what

about your friend? What will happen to her?'

The Doctor said nothing for a moment.

'She'll die, won't she?'

'Would you rather this world be taken over by the Barasci?'

'I would never kill for what I believe in,' said Francis, 'but I

would die for it.' With that, he leapt off the walkway.

Watching in horror, the Doctor saw Francis landing among a crowd of startled Barasci. ‘You don’t stand a chance, you stupid man!’

‘Greater love has no man than this,’ cried Francis, ‘that he lay down his life for his brother.’ He scrambled up, and ran towards Sarah, the Barasci guards taking flight to come after him. ‘Or sister, for that matter! I need not live, only save her from these creatures!’

‘There’s no way you’ll make it!’ the Doctor cried. Then a thought struck him. ‘Sarah, can you still hear me?’

‘Yes, Doctor,’ she replied, her voice surfacing again from beneath the roar of the Barasci, ‘but I won’t change my mind.’

‘The Barasci are forcing people to believe, Sarah. But what’s the one thing in the universe that can only be given freely?’ the Doctor shouted, as Francis ran up the dais towards Sarah, Barasci guards flying down towards him, their spears raised.

‘What?’ asked Sarah. She had forced the word out. Her poor

mind must be being crushed by the weight of what was passing through her, realised the Doctor. The Barasci surrounded Francis. He tried to push past them, but was pushed back, surrounded on all sides.

‘Francis of Assisi is trying to rescue you, because he loves the saviour he believes in, and he loves humanity, for all its faults,’ cried the Doctor as the Barasci raised their spears. ‘But that love can only be given freely. What the Barasci are doing would bring peace, but they’d destroy the things that make peace worth having.

Sarah, you have to listen!'

Sarah gasped then keeled forward. The Doctor wanted desperately to reach his friend but knew that the Barasci would be on him in an instant. In fact, he was amazed they hadn't come for him at all. Then he saw Sarah stand, her expression once again filled with its ordinary life and vigour. 'I remember now, they brainwashed me! But the Mindspell is broken. Oh, Doctor, I've been a fool!'

'Poppycock! You can take control of the Mindspell!' shouted the Doctor. 'You're still connected – can you do anything to save Francis?'

'Who?' asked Sarah, then spotting the terrified man surrounded by Barasci soldiers, she added, 'I don't think I need to!'

The aliens were arguing among themselves, chattering away angrily, too concerned with whatever they were saying to pay any attention to Francis.

'The idea of freedom,' said Sarah, 'they all heard it when you reminded me of it. Some of them agree and it's spreading through the Hive mind. Some are convinced, others not. They're arguing among themselves.'

'Just what we need,' grinned the Doctor, leaping from walkway to walkway towards Sarah and Francis, unchallenged by any Barasci. 'Now, stop the Mindspell. You need to undo the damage that's already been caused. Then we've got to get out of here as fast as we can.'

‘But, Doctor, the Barasci were right that thousands, millions of

people will die over the next few centuries. All these religious wars, the prejudice, the fear and the superstitions,’ said Sarah. The Doctor reached her and took her hands in his. ‘Couldn’t I drop them a few hints? Everyone is born equal, women aren’t an inferior species,

freedom is a good idea, that sort of thing. Maybe instil an inkling of democracy?’

‘Oh, Sarah,’ said the Doctor gently. ‘No matter how enlightened

the ideals of the 20th-century might seem in comparison to the

thirteenth, I’ve come across philosophies and political systems,

ideals and religions from across the stars and the ends of history, that make the ideas of your time seem like childish scribblings. To introduce them to your time would tear your world apart, just as to introduce your ideas now could tear the medieval world apart.

Humanity must learn these things in its own time. That Francis here can preach peace when everyone around him wields the sword

shows what you locate capable of. But hurry, judging by the amount of noisy Barasci, the Mindspell will be broken any second.’

Sarah could feel the minds of the prisoners below, the changes

made by the Barasci. She closed her eyes in concentration as she

held the Mindspell together, long enough to reduce it to one simple command: *undo any changes to the humans’ minds*. She released it, just as the spell snapped, and fell to the floor.

The Doctor and Francis picked her up, while all around the

Barasci were chattering and arguing furiously. The Doctor took his sonic screwdriver and pointed it at the control panel. Below him,

the bars holding the prisoners swayed and parted like grass in the wind, and the startled captives quickly stumbled out.

‘What will happen to the Barasci?’ asked Sarah

‘They’ve got to deal with disagreement among themselves,

probably for the first time in millennia,’ said the Doctor. ‘Let’s leave them to it. It should give them bigger things to worry about than their plans for this world. I’ve activated this ship’s launch sequence, so it really is time to leave.’

Not long later, Sarah and Francis were making their way through

the marshland, led by the Doctor, his boots happily squelching in

the damp ground. ‘Now that the Mindspell is destroyed, the

memory of the Barasci should fade away,’ the Doctor told them.

‘History will never know what happened here. Just us.’

‘Why have you brought us here?’ asked Francis. ‘And what’s this

blue box?’

‘What? This old thing?’ smiled Sarah. ‘Let’s just call it our

transportation. It’s time we were heading off, Francis. It was great to meet you. But perhaps the Doctor and I will actually get to the Pyramids this time.’

‘It’s been an honour to meet you, Francis,’ said the Doctor. ‘Just keep this little adventure quiet, there’s a good chap.’

‘Doctor, before you go, I have a question for you, and I pray that I will understand your answer. I believe in peace, because I believe in a God of peace,’ said Francis. ‘What about you? Why do you

fight for peace?’

The Doctor took a deep breath and Sarah watched him struggle

for an answer.

‘I believe in the potential of all life, of all thinking creatures, for good,’ he replied. ‘I’ve seen enough of the universe to know that

there are more things in heaven and earth than even I know about.

But gods and demons? Miracles and curses?' He gave a shrug. 'In my experience, people who worship gods usually end up getting eaten by them, in some cases quite literally. Science usually finds an answer and, even when it doesn't, I happen to think it's asking the right questions.'

'So you travel to acquire knowledge? But why not seek not just knowledge, but truth?'

'Ah, Truth, with a capital "T",' mused the Doctor. 'What if I were to discover all the things I believe sentient life is capable of – goodness, truth, beauty? Should I stop fighting for them just because they weren't handed down from on high? What if they aren't True, as you put it?'

'But what if they are?' insisted Francis. The Doctor didn't answer, but took his key from his pocket and unlocked the TARDIS door, holding it open for Sarah who stepped inside ahead of him.

'Time for us to travel onwards and upwards,' said the Doctor.

'Oh, and what you see next might seem miraculous, even magical, but I promise you, it's not.'

About the Authors

MIKE AMBERRY lives in Lancashire, where he tries to combine a job in the civil service with a number of increasingly eccentric hobbies. When not hunting for geocaches in various obscure locations, he can sometimes be found waving sticks and hankies around in the company of men who are old enough to know better. In the light of this, his long-standing love for all things *Doctor Who*

seems reassuringly normal. *Trial by Fire* is his second published work of short fiction.

ARNOLD T BLUMBERG used to borrow books on magic tricks

from the library when he was a kid and can still occasionally shuffle a deck of cards and keep the ace of spades on top. He's the co-author of *Howe's Transcendental Toybox* and *Zombiemania* from Telos Publishing and the designer of many other Telos publications, including *The Target Book*. He is also curator of the pop culture exhibition Geppi's Entertainment Museum. He previously wrote for

Short Trips: How the Doctor Changed My Life. Oh, and he also bought a lot of those little plastic magic trick kits from that shop in Disney World.

JOHN CALLAGHAN is a songwriter and performer of pensive

and eccentric electronic songs. His gigs straddle cabaret, rock-style shows and performance art and he has performed in London,

Austria, Germany and France. He's released three singles (two on

the Warp label) and an album (*It Might Never Happen*, Uncharted Audio, 2007). His day job is as an artists' model: he's posed as a trampolining gimp and as Michelangelo's *David* (being covered in food by art gallery patrons). He is 173cm tall, weighs 73kg, has a blood pressure of 110/60Hg. *Have You Tried Turning It Off And*

Then Back On Again? is his second professionally published work of fiction.

NEIL CORRY's first work for Big Finish was as an alien delegate in *The Apocalypse Element* – all of one line. At the time of going to print, he is a writer and sub-editor for *Doctor Who Battles In Time* and the *Doctor Who DVD Files* for publisher GE Fabbri, which is probably the best job in the world. His short stories have appeared in two *Short Trips* and a *Professor Bernice Summerfield* anthology, and he co-wrote *Professor Bernice Summerfield and The Heart's*

Desire with David Bailey. He lives in London, loves Chelsea Football Club and gives thanks on a daily basis that *Doctor Who* is loved more than ever. These are good times.

STEPHEN DUNN lives in North Yorkshire. He fervently hopes that a time traveller from the future will use this information to send him winning lottery numbers. He will, of course, use the money for the betterment of humankind and to complete his *Doctor Who* collection. Stephen would like to thank his wife Lisa and his parents-in-law Gerry and Shirley Englebright for all their support. The observant among you will notice that Lisa is also the name of the girl in Stephen's story. Lisa wants people to know that this wasn't her idea. Stephen's first story *Potential* was published in *Short Trips: How the Doctor Changed My Life*.

IAN FARRINGTON has edited five *Short Trips* collections – *Past Tense*, *Monsters*, *A Day in the Life*, *The Centenarian* and *Defining Patterns* – and was the range editor of the series for its first 22 anthologies. He has written for many *Short Trips* and *Professor Bernice Summerfield* books, co-produced Big Finish's *UNIT* audio series, and was the assistant producer of the company's *Doctor Who* audio ranges from 2002 until 2006. He has also contributed to *Doctor Who Magazine* and is currently the sub-editor of *All About Soap*.

JAMES GOSS wrote the *Torchwood* novel *Almost Perfect* and contributed to Joseph Lidster's *Short Trips: Snapshots*. He's written plays, one of which won the 2007 LA Weekly Theatre Award for Best Adaptation. He's also made websites for *Doctor Who*, *Torchwood* and E4. Despite not being able to draw, he produced the cartoon *Doctor Who: The Infinite Quest* for BBC One and oversaw the animation of the missing episodes of *Doctor Who: The Invasion*. He's currently making increasingly strange *Doctor Who* DVD extras.

SIMON GUERRIER is the author of the *Doctor Who* novels *The Time Travellers*, featuring the First Doctor, and *The Pirate Loop* and *The Slitheen Excursion*, featuring the Tenth. He's written numerous short stories and audio plays for Big Finish as well as an episode of the new *Blake's 7*. He was also the editor of *Short Trips: How The Doctor*

Changed My Life, a collection of 25 short stories by first-time authors. He lives in London with a bright wife and a dim cat.

STEPHEN HATCHER is a teacher of modern languages who, in his spare time, is co-ordinator of the Whoovers, one of Britain's biggest *Doctor Who* local groups, based in Derby. Steve has contributed to a number of fanzines, including *Shockeye's Kitchen*, *Enlightenment*, *Myth Makers* and *TSV* and is the author of four stories published in previous *Short Trips* collections: ' *Ante Bellum*' in *Past Tense*, ' *The Touch of the Nurazh*' in *Monsters*, ' *Testament*' in *The Centenarian* and ' *Closing The Account*' in *Defining Patterns*.

MATTHEW JAMES has been a *Doctor Who* fan since episode three of *The Sensorites*, *Hidden Danger*, having been born the day after episode two, *The Unwilling Warriors*. It took many years before he was able to buy the video to catch up on what he missed.

He lives near Maidenhead and works for the civil service in London. When not looking busy in the corridors of power or bombarding publishers, TV companies and, of course, Big Finish with elaborate manuscripts, he indulges in amateur dramatics and walking his dog, Henry.

STEVE LYONS has written more than thirty licensed *Doctor Who* adventures, including novels (*The Stealers of Dreams*, *The Witch Hunters*, *The Crooked World*), audio dramas for radio and CD (*Blood of the Daleks*, *The Fires of Vulcan*, *Son of the Dragon*) and entries in numerous anthologies. He has also co-written two books about the series, and worked on the official *Doctor Who Magazine*. His non-Who work has brought him into contact with such characters as the *X-Men*, *Micronauts*, *Sapphire & Steel*, *Strontium Dog* and the denizens of the *Warhammer* universe. He lives in Salford, near – but not quite in – Manchester.

MICHAEL REES is still giddy after achieving the status of

'professional writer', something he takes great pleasure in telling anyone who will listen. When not hanging around bookshops,

offering to autograph books, Michael enjoys watching old episodes

of *Doctor Who*, claiming that it all counts as research. He witnesses the magic of *Doctor Who* transforming his home city of Cardiff into London on a weekly basis. Despite his close vicinity, *Torchwood* has yet to recruit him.

GARETH ROBERTS has written many television scripts for series such as *Emmerdale*, *Randall & Hopkirk (Deceased)* and *Swiss Toni*.

His *Doctor Who* writing career stretches back to 1993 when he wrote *The Highest Science* for Virgin's *New Adventures*, and since then he has written another nine original *Doctor Who* novels, as 261

well as two *Doctor Who* audio plays for Big Finish with Clayton Hickman. Since the return of *Doctor Who* to TV, he has written the TARDISodes for mobile phone that accompanied the second series,

the interactive adventure *Attack Of The Graske*, and the episodes *The Shakespeare Code* and *The Unicorn and the Wasp*. He has also contributed five stories to *The Sarah Jane Adventures*. He is currently writing the 2009 *Doctor Who* easter special with Russell T

Davies.

EDDIE ROBSON is the author of several *Doctor Who* plays for Big Finish, including *Memory Lane*, *Human Resources*, *The Condemned*, *Grand Theft Cosmos*, *The Raincloud Man* and *Masters of War*, and is the producer of the *Bernice Summerfield* range of audios. He has also written books on the Coen brothers and film

noir, comedy for Radio 4's *Look Away Now* and BBC7's *Tilt*, and pieces for numerous magazines. He does not write humorous bias

for 'About The Authors' sections.

JIM SANGSTER contributed to the *Short Trips* anthologies *Zodiac* and *A Christmas Treasury*, as well as *Bernice Summerfield: Life During Wartime*. His monster sculptures graced the covers of the Big Finish audio plays *The Spectre of Lanyon Moor* and *The Shadow of the Scourge*, and he played the challenging role of *Zagreus* in the play *Omega*. As a

TV historian, he's appeared on a number of *Doctor Who* DVD documentaries as well as the TV

shows *Pure 24* and *Call the Cops*. His books include *Hitchcock*, *Scorsese*, *Spooks: Confidential* and *TV Heaven*. He lives in London.

CAVAN SCOTT and **MARK WRIGHT** have collaborated on three audio plays in Big Finish's *Doctor Who* range and a number of short stories. Their first novel, *Project: Valhalla*, was published in 2005, and they edited the 2007 *Short Trips* collection *The Ghosts of Christmas*. More recently, they have co-produced the second season of Big Finish's *Iris Wildthyme* audio series starring Katy Manning.

Cavan is the editor of *BBC Countryfile* magazine and has written for Big Finish's *The Tomorrow People* and *2000AD* ranges. Mark is the production editor of *All About Soap*, and, as well as writing for the *Tomorrow People* series, adapted Bryan Talbot's classic comic series *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright*.

DAVID N SMITH was the winner of the 2006 *Bernice*

Summerfield short-story writing competition. He has also previously written several internet training videos, a couple of short films, and a handful of late night TV comedy sketches. His life seems to be

just a sequence of random events and crazy coincidences, many of

which are so ridiculously implausible that you'd never believe them if they were printed here. He'd be more than happy to discuss them over a drink though, particularly if you're buying.

GARETH WIGMORE has been a *Doctor Who* fan since the

moment, long ago, when he realised he wanted to be Jon Pertwee.

Almost immediately, he started writing articles and fiction and

found a bunch of friends to publish fanzines with. For the past

decade he has done fun things with other people's words for

Hansard, the official report of the Houses of Parliament; these days, he is a managing editor in the House of Lords. He is married to a

sexy nurse and, although he hasn't warned her that one day he

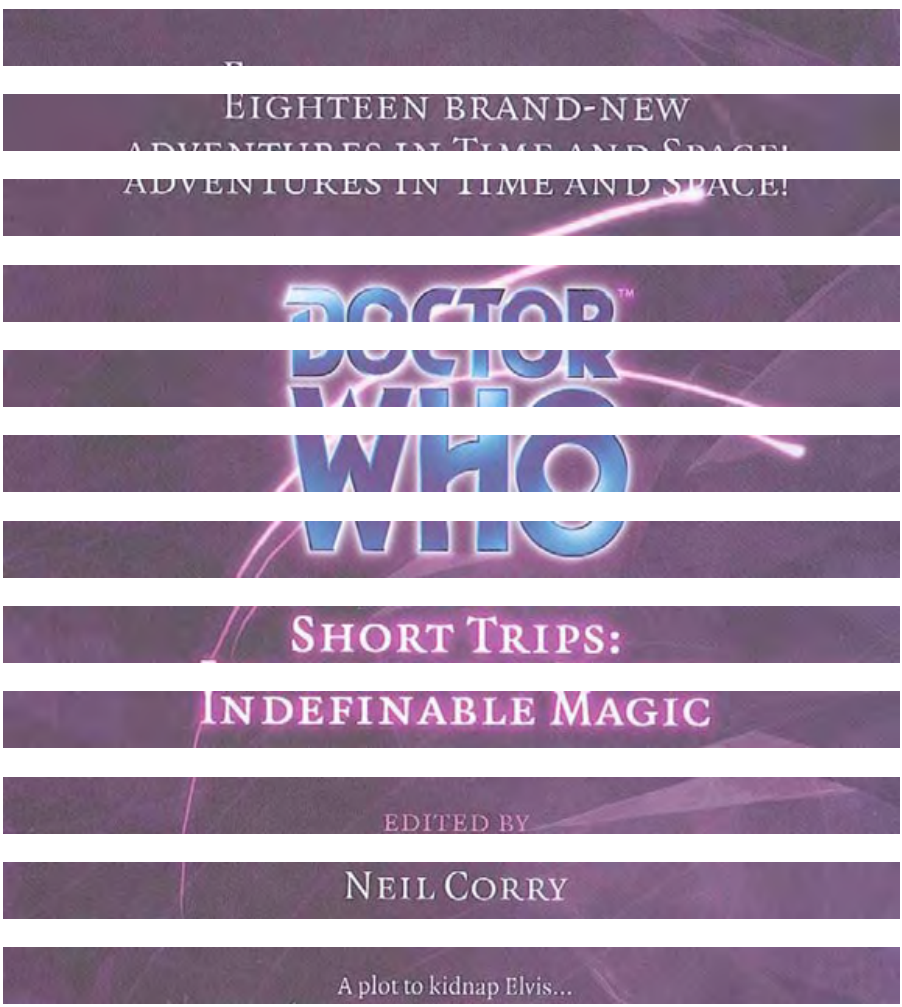
might turn into Jon Pertwee, he suspects she worked it out long ago.

CALEB WOODBRIDGE lives on top of the Rift – sorry, in

Cardiff, where he has to resist the urge to break in to the BBC

Wales offices and demand that they let him write for the show right now. His plans to become a Proper Writer continue apace with

Blessed Are the Peacemakers, his second professionally published short story, and he is currently working on scripts, novels and other writing projects. He likes to natter about *Doctor Who* with his friends and put it on the internet as *A Podcast of Impossible Things*.



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ISBN 978-1-84435-384-2

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- _FC
- _Dedication
- _Index
- _ST28
- RC